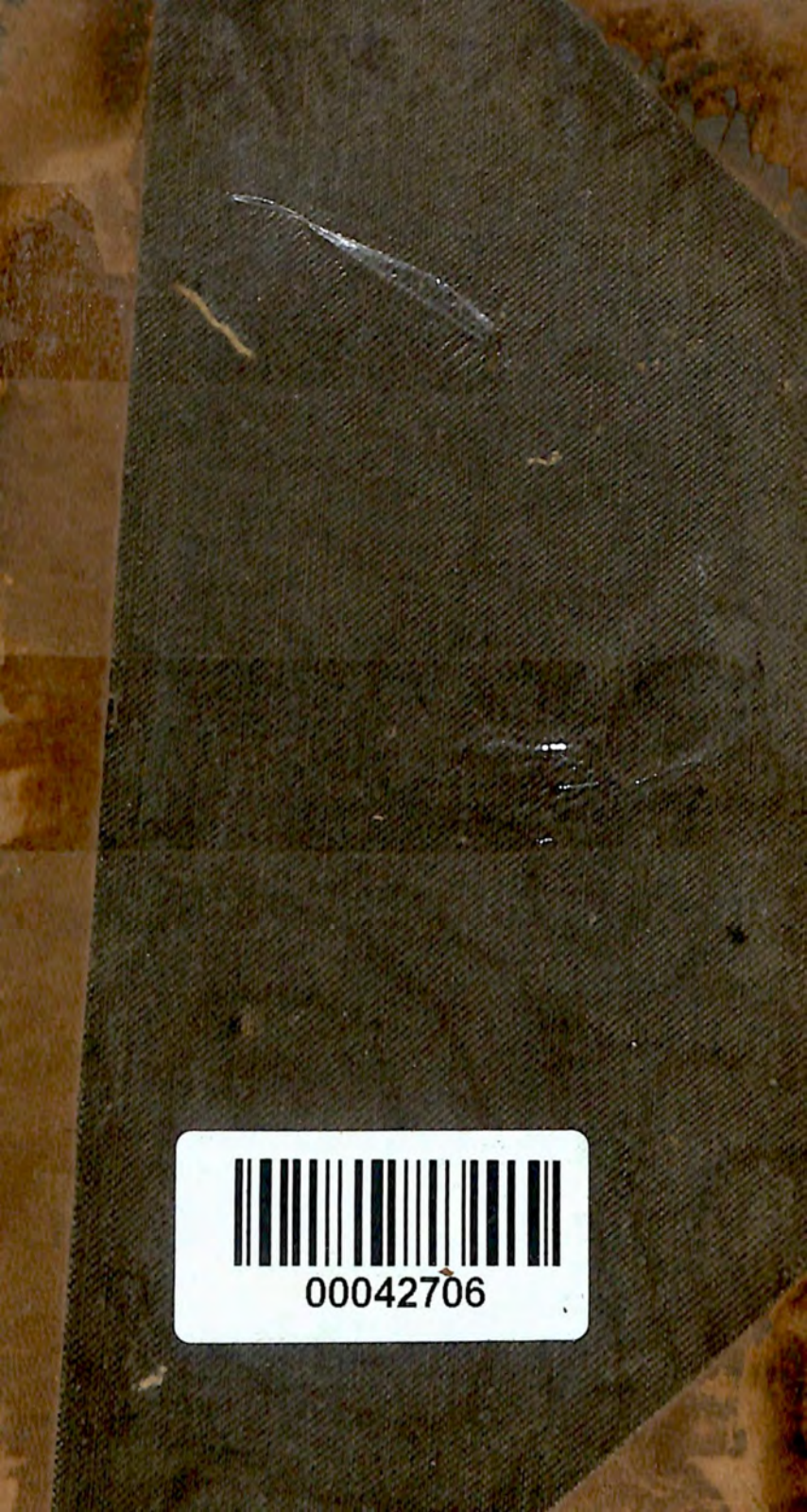
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THE

PLEA

OF

THE MIDSUMMER FAIRIES.

THE

PLEA

OF

THE MIDSUMMER FAIRIES

HERO AND LEANDER,

LYCUS THE CENTAUR,

AND

OTHER POEMS

By THOMAS HOOD,

AUTHOR OF "WHIMS AND ODDITIES," ETC. ETC.

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TO

CHARLES LAMB, Esq.

My dear Friend,

I THANK my literary fortune that I am not reduced, like many better wits, to barter dedications, for the hope or promise of patronage, with some nominally great man; but that where true affection points, and honest respect, I am free to gratify my head and heart by a sincere inscription. An intimacy and dearness, worthy of a much earlier date than our acquaintance can refer to, direct me at once to your name: and with this acknowledgment of your ever kind feeling towards me, I desire to record a respect and admiration for you as a writer, which no one acquainted with our literature, save Elia himself, will think disproportionate or misplaced. If I had not these better reasons to govern me, I should be guided to the same selection by your intense yet critical relish for the works of our great Dramatist, and for that favourite play in particular which has furnished the subject of my verses.

It is my design, in the following Poem, to celebrate, by an allegory, that immortality which Shakspeare has conferred on the Fairy mythology by his Midsummer Night's Dream. But for him, those pretty children of our childhood would leave barely their names to our maturer years; they belong, as the mites upon the plumb, to the bloom of fancy, a thing generally too frail and beautiful to withstand the rude handling of time: but the Poet has made this most perishable part of the mind's creation equal to the most enduring; he has so intertwined the Elfins with human sympathies, and linked them by so many delightful associations with the productions of nature, that they are as real to the mind's eye, as their green magical circles to the outer sense.

It would have been a pity for such a race to go extinct, even though they were but as the butterflies that hover about the leaves and blossoms of the visible world.

I am, my dear Friend,

Yours most truly,

T. HOOD.

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THE

PLEA

OF

THE MIDSUMMER FAIRIES.

I.

'Twas in that mellow season of the year.
When the hot Sun singes the yellow leaves
Till they be gold, — and with a broader sphere
The Moon looks down on Ceres and her sheaves;
When more abundantly the spider weaves,
And the cold wind breathes from a chillier clime;
That forth I fared, on one of those still eves,
Touch'd with the dewy sadness of the time,
To think how the bright months had spent their prime.

II.

So that, wherever I address'd my way,
I seem'd to track the melancholy feet
Of him that is the Father of Decay,
And spoils at once the sour weed and the sweet; —
Wherefore regretfully I made retreat
To some unwasted regions of my brain,
Charm'd with the light of summer and the heat,
And bade that bounteous season bloom again,
And sprout fresh flowers in mine own domain.

III.

It was a shady and sequester'd scene,
Like those famed gardens of Boccaccio,
Planted with his own laurels evergreen,
And roses that for endless summer blow;
And there were founting springs to overflow
Their marble basins, — and cool green arcades
Of tall o'erarching sycamores, to throw
Athwart the dappled path their dancing shades, —
With timid coneys cropping the green blades.

IV.

And there were crystal pools, peopled with fish,
Argent and gold; and some of Tyrian skin,
Some crimson-barr'd; — and ever at a wish
They rose obsequious till the wave grew thin
As glass upon their backs, and then dived in,
Quenching their ardent scales in watery gloom;
Whilst others with fresh hues row'd forth to win
My changeable regard, — for so we doom
Things born of thought to vanish or to bloom.

V.

And there were many birds of many dyes,
From tree to tree still faring to and fro,
And stately peacocks with their splendid eyes,
And gorgeous pheasants with their golden glow,
Like Iris just bedabbled in her bow,
Besides some vocalists, without a name,
That oft on fairy errands come and go,
With accents magical; — and all were tame,
And peckled at my hand where'er I came.

VI.

And for my sylvan company, in lieu
Of Pampinea with her lively peers,
Sate Queen Titania with her pretty crew,
All in their liveries quaint, with elfin gears,
For she was gracious to my childish years,
And made me free of her enchanted round;
Wherefore this dreamy scene she still endears,
And plants her court upon a verdant mound,
Fenced with umbrageous woods and groves profound.

VII.

"Ah me," she cries, "was ever moonlight seen
So clear and tender for our midnight trips?
Go some one forth, and with a trump convene
My lieges all!" — Away the goblin skips
A pace or two apart, and deftly strips
The ruddy skin from a sweet rose's cheek,
Then blows the shuddering leaf between his lips,
Making it utter forth a shrill small shriek,
Like a fray'd bird in the grey owlet's beak.

VIII.

And lo! upon my fix'd delighted ken
Appear'd the loyal Fays. — Some by degrees
Crept from the primrose buds that open'd then,
And some from bell-shap'd blossoms like the bees,
Some from the dewy meads, and rushy leas,
Flew up like chafers when the rustics pass;
Some from the rivers, others from tall trees
Dropp'd, like shed blossoms, silent to the grass,
Spirits and elfins small, of every class.

IX.

Peri and Pixy, and quaint Puck the Antic,
Brought Robin Goodfellow, that merry swain;
And stealthy Mab, queen of old realms romantic,
Came too, from distance, in her tiny wain,
Fresh dripping from a cloud — some bloomy rain,
Then circling the bright Moon, had wash'd her car,
And still bedew'd it with a various stain:
Lastly came Ariel, shooting from a star,
Who bears all fairy embassies afar.

X.

But Oberon, that night elsewhere exiled,
Was absent, whether some distemper'd spleen
Kept him and his fair mate unreconciled,
Or warfare with the Gnome (whose race had been
Sometime obnoxious), kept him from his queen,
And made her now peruse the starry skies
Prophetical with such an absent mien;
Howbeit, the tears stole often to her eyes,
And oft the Moon was incensed with her sighs —

XI.

Which made the elves sport drearily, and soon
Their hushing dances languish'd to a stand,
Like midnight leaves when, as the Zephyrs swoon,
All on their drooping stems they sink unfann'd, —
So into silence droop'd the fairy band,
To see their empress dear so pale and still,
Crowding her softly round on either hand,
As pale as frosty snow-drops, and as chill,
To whom the sceptred dame reveals her ill.

XII.

" Alas," quoth she, " ye know our fairy lives
Are leased upon the fickle faith of men;
Not measured out against fate's mortal knives,
Like human gossamers, we perish when
We fade, and are forgot in worldly ken, —
Though poesy has thus prolong'd our date,
Thanks be to the sweet Bard's auspicious pen
That rescued us so long! — howbeit of late
I feel some dark misgivings of our fate.

XIII.

" And this dull day my melancholy sleep
Hath been so throng'd with images of woe,
That even now I cannot choose but weep
To think this was some sad prophetic show
Of future horror to befall us so, —
Of mortal wreck and uttermost distress, —
Yea, our poor empire's fall and overthrow, —
For this was my long vision's dreadful stress,
And when I waked my trouble was not less.

XIV.

" Whenever to the clouds I tried to seek,
Such leaden weight dragg'd these Icarian wings,
My faithless wand was wavering and weak,
And slimy toads had trespass'd in our rings —
The birds refused to sing for me — all things
Disown'd their old allegiance to our spells;
The rude bees prick'd me with their rebel stings;
And, when I pass'd, the valley-lily's bells
Rang out, methought, most melancholy knells.

XV.

" And ever on the faint and flagging air
A doleful spirit with a dreary note
Cried in my fearful ear, ' Prepare! prepare!'
Which soon I knew came from a raven's throat,
Perch'd on a cypress bough not far remote, —
A cursed bird, too crafty to be shot,
That alway cometh with his soot-black coat
To make hearts dreary: — for he is a blot
Upon the book of life, as well ye wot! —

XVI.

" Wherefore some while I bribed him to be mute,
With bitter acorns stuffing his foul maw,
Which barely I appeased, when some fresh bruit
Startled me all aheap! — and soon I saw
The horridest shape that ever raised my awe, —
A monstrous giant, very huge and tall,
Such as in elder times, devoid of law,
With wicked might grieved the primeval ball,
And this was sure the deadliest of them all!

XVII.

" Gaunt was he as a wolf of Languedoc,
With bloody jaws, and frost upon his crown;
So from his barren poll one hoary lock
Over his wrinkled front fell far adown,
Well nigh to where his frosty brows did frown
Like jagged icicles at cottage eaves;
And for his coronal he wore some brown
And bristled ears gather'd from Ceres' sheaves,
Entwined with certain sere and russet leaves.

XVIII.

" And lo! upon a mast rear'd far aloft,
He bore a very bright and crescent blade,
The which he waved so dreadfully, and oft,
In meditative spite, that, sore dismay'd,
I crept into an acorn-cup for shade;
Meanwhile the horrid effigy went by:
I trow his look was dreadful, for it made
The trembling birds betake them to the sky,
For every leaf was lifted by his sigh.

XIX.

" And ever as he sigh'd, his foggy breath
Blurr'd out the landscape like a flight of smoke:
Thence knew I this was either dreary Death
Or Time, who leads all creatures to his stroke.
Ah wretched me!" — Here, even as she spoke,
The melancholy Shape came gliding in,
And lean'd his back against an antique oak,
Folding his wings, that were so fine and thin,
They scarce were seen against the Dryad's skin.

XX.

Then what a fear seized all the little rout!
Look how a flock of panick'd sheep will stare —
And huddle close — and start — and wheel about,
Watching the roaming mongrel here and there, —
So did that sudden Apparition scare
All close aheap those small affrighted things;
Nor sought they now the safety of the air,
As if some leaden spell withheld their wings;
But who can fly that ancientest of Kings?

XXI.

Whom now the Queen, with a forestalling tear
And previous sigh, beginneth to entreat,
Bidding him spare, for love, her lieges dear:
"Alas!" quoth she, "is there no nodding wheat
Ripe for thy crooked weapon, and more meet, —
Or wither'd leaves to ravish from the tree, —
Or crumbling battlements for thy defeat?
Think but what vaunting monuments there be
Builded in spite and mockery of thee.

XXII.

" O fret away the fabric walls of Fame,
And grind down marble Cæsars with the dust:
Make tombs inscriptionless — raze each high name,
And waste old armours of renown with rust:
Do all of this, and thy revenge is just:
Make such decays the trophies of thy prime,
And check Ambition's overweening lust,
That dares exterminating war with Time, —
But we are guiltless of that lofty crime.

XXIII.

" Frail feeble sprites! — the children of a dream!
Leased on the sufferance of fickle men,
Like motes dependent on the sunny beam,
Living but in the sun's indulgent ken,
And when that light withdraws, withdrawing then; —
So do we flutter in the glance of youth
And fervid fancy, — and so perish when
The eye of faith grows aged; — in sad truth,
Feeling thy sway, O Time! though not thy tooth!

XXIV.

" Where be those old divinities forlorn,
That dwelt in trees, or haunted in a stream?
Alas! their memories are dimm'd and torn,
Like the remainder tatters of a dream:
So will it fare with our poor thrones, I deem; —
For us the same dark trench Oblivion delves,
That holds the wastes of every human scheme.
O spare us then, — and these our pretty elves,
We soon, alas! shall perish of ourselves!"

XXV.

Now as she ended, with a sigh, to name
Those old Olympians, scatter'd by the whirl
Of fortune's giddy wheel and brought to shame,
Methought a scornful and malignant curl
Show'd on the lips of that malicious churl,
To think what noble havocks he had made;
So that I fear'd he all at once would hurl
The harmless fairies into endless shade, —
Howbeit he stopp'd awhile to whet his blade.

XXVI.

Pity it was to hear the elfins' wail
Rise up in concert from their mingled dread;
Pity it was to see them, all so pale,
Gaze on the grass as for a dying bed; —
But Puck was seated on a spider's thread,
That hung between two branches of a briar,
And 'gan to swing and gambol heels o'er head,
Like any Southwark tumbler on a wire,
For him no present grief could long inspire.

XXVII.

Meanwhile the Queen with many piteous drops,
Falling like tiny sparks full fast and free,
Bedews a pathway from her throne; — and stops
Before the foot of her arch enemy,
And with her little arms enfolds his knee,
That shows more gristly from that fair embrace;
But she will ne'er depart. "Alas!" quoth she,
"My painful fingers I will here enlace
Till I have gain'd your pity for our race.

XXVIII.

" What have we ever done to earn this grudge,
And hate — (if not too humble for thy hating ?) —
Look o'er our labours and our lives, and judge
If there be any ills of our creating;
For we are very kindly creatures, dating
With nature's charities still sweet and bland: —
O think this murder worthy of debating !" —
Herewith she makes a signal with her hand,
To beckon some one from the Fairy band.

XXIX.

Anon I saw one of those elfin things,
Clad all in white like any chorister,
Come fluttering forth on his melodious wings,
That made soft music at each little stir,
But something louder than a bee's demur
Before he lights upon a bunch of broom,
And thus 'gan he with Saturn to confer, —
And O his voice was sweet, touch'd with the gloom
Of that sad theme that argued of his doom!

XXX.

Quoth he, "We make all melodies our care,
That no false discords may offend the Sun,
Music's great master — tuning every where
All pastoral sounds and melodies, each one
Duly to place and season, so that none
May harshly interfere. We rouse at morn
The shrill sweet lark; and when the day is done,
Hush silent pauses for the bird forlorn,
That singeth with her breast against a thorn.

XXXI.

"We gather in loud choirs the twittering race,
That make a chorus with their single note;
And tend on new-fledged birds in every place,
That duly they may get their tunes by rote;
And oft, like echoes, answering remote,
We hide in thickets from the feather'd throng,
And strain in rivalship each throbbing throat,
Singing in shrill responses all day long,
Whilst the glad truant listens to our song.

XXXII.

" Wherefore, great King of Years, as thou dost love
The raining music from a morning cloud,
When vanish'd larks are carolling above,
To wake Apollo with their pipings loud; —
If ever thou hast heard in leafy shroud
The sweet and plaintive Sappho of the dell,
Show thy sweet mercy on this little crowd,
And we will muffle up the sheepfold bell
Whene'er thou listenest to Philomel."

XXXIII.

Then Saturn thus: — " Sweet is the merry lark,
That carols in man's ear so clear and strong;
And youth must love to listen in the dark
That tuneful elegy of Tereus' wrong;
But I have heard that ancient strain too long,
For sweet is sweet but when a little strange,
And I grow weary for some newer song;
For wherefore had I wings, unless to range
Through all things mutable from change to change?

XXXIV.

"But wouldst thou hear the melodies of Time,
Listen when sleep and drowsy darkness roll
Over hush'd cities, and the midnight chime
Sounds from their hundred clocks, and deep bells toll
Like a last knell over the dead world's soul,
Saying, Time shall be final of all things,
Whose late, last voice must elegise the whole, —
O then I clap aloft my brave broad wings,
And make the wide air tremble while it rings!"

XXXV.

Then next a fair Eve-Fay made meek address,
Saying, "We be the handmaids of the Spring,
In sign whereof, May, the quaint broideress,
Hath wrought her samplers on our gauzy wing.
We tend upon buds' birth and blossoming,
And count the leafy tributes that they owe —
As, so much to the earth — so much to fling
In showers to the brook — so much to go
In whirlwinds to the clouds that made them grow.

XXXVI.

" The pastoral cowslips are our little pets,
And daisy stars, whose firmament is green;
Pansies, and those veil'd nuns, meek violets,
Sighing to that warm world from which they screen;
And golden daffodils, pluck'd for May's Queen;
And lonely harebells, quaking on the heath;
And Hyacinth, long since a fair youth seen,
Whose tuneful voice, turn'd fragrance in his breath,
Kiss'd by sad Zephyr, guilty of his death.

XXXVII.

" The widow'd primrose weeping to the moon,
And saffron crocus in whose chalice bright
A cool libation hoarded for the noon
Is kept — and she that purifies the light,
The virgin lily, faithful to her white,
Whereon Eve wept in Eden for her shame;
And the most dainty rose, Aurora's spright,
Our every godchild, by whatever name —
Spare us our lives, for we did nurse the same!"

XXXVIII.

Then that old Mower stamp'd his heel, and struck
His hurtful scythe against the harmless ground,
Saying, " Ye foolish imps, when am I stuck
With gaudy buds, or like a wooer crown'd
With flow'ry chaplets, save when they are found
Wither'd? — Whenever have I pluck'd a rose,
Except to scatter its vain leaves around?
For so all gloss of beauty I oppose,
And bring decay on every flow'r that blows.

XXXIX.

" Or when am I so wroth as when I view
The wanton pride of Summer; — how she decks
The birth-day world with blossoms ever new,
As if Time had not lived, and heap'd great wrecks
Of years on years? — O then I bravely vex
And catch the gay Months in their gaudy plight,
And slay them with the wreaths about their necks,
Like foolish heifers in the holy rite,
And raise great trophies to my ancient might."

XL.

Then saith another, " We are kindly things,
And like her offspring nestle with the dove, —
Witness these hearts embroider'd on our wings,
To show our constant patronage of love: —
We sit at even, in sweet bow'rs above
Lovers, and shake rich odours on the air,
To mingle with their sighs; and still remove
The startling owl, and bid the bat forbear
Their privacy, and haunt some other where.

XLI.

" And we are near the mother when she sits
Beside her infant in its wicker bed;
And we are in the fairy scene that flits
Across its tender brain: sweet dreams we shed,
And whilst the tender little soul is fled
Away, to sport with our young elves, the while
We touch the dimpled cheek with roses red,
And tickle the soft lips until they smile,
So that their careful parents they beguile.

XLII.

" O then, if ever thou hast breathed a vow
At Love's dear portal, or at pale moon-rise
Crush'd the dear curl on a regardful brow
That did not frown thee from thy honey prize —
If ever thy sweet son sat on thy thighs,
And wooed thee from thy careful thoughts within
To watch the harmless beauty of his eyes,
Or glad thy fingers on his smooth soft skin,
For Love's dear sake, let us thy pity win!"

XLIII.

Then Saturn fiercely thus: — " What joy have I
In tender babes, that have devour'd mine own,
Whenever to the light I heard them cry,
Till foolish Rhea cheated me with stone?
Whereon, till now, is my great hunger shown,
In monstrous dints of my enormous tooth;
And, — but the peopled world is too full grown
For hunger's edge, — I would consume all youth
At one great meal, without delay or ruth!

XLIV.

" For I am well nigh craz'd and wild to hear
How boastful fathers taunt me with their breed,
Saying, We shall not die nor disappear,
But in these other selves, ourselves succeed,
Ev'n as ripe flowers pass into their seed
Only to be renew'd from prime to prime,
All of which boastings I am forced to read,
Besides a thousand challenges to Time
Which bragging lovers have compil'd in rhyme.

XLV.

" Wherefore, when they are sweetly met o' nights,
There will I steal, and with my hurried hand
Startle them suddenly from their delights
Before the next encounter hath been plann'd,
Ravishing hours in little minutes spann'd;
But when they say farewell, and grieve apart,
Then like a leaden statue I will stand,
Meanwhile their many tears encrust my dart,
And with a ragged edge cut heart from heart."

XLVI.

Then next a merry Woodsman, clad in green,
Stept vanward from his mates, that idly stood
Each at his proper ease, as they had been
Nursed in the liberty of old Shérwood,
And wore the livery of Robin Hood,
Who wont in forest shades to dine and sup, —
So came this chief right frankly, and made good
His haunch against his axe, and thus spoke up,
Doffing his cap, which was an acorn's cup: —

XLVII.

" We be small foresters and gay, who tend
On trees, and all their furniture of green,
Training the young boughs airily to bend,
And show blue snatches of the sky between; —
Or knit more close intricacies, to screen
Birds' crafty dwellings as may hide them best,
But most the timid blackbird's — she, that seen,
Will bear black poisonous berries to her nest,
Lest man should cage the darlings of her breast.

XLVIII.

" We bend each tree in proper attitude,
And founting willows train in silvery falls;
We frame all shady roofs and arches rude,
And verdant aisles leading to Dryads' halls,
Or deep recesses where the Echo calls; —
We shape all plumy trees against the sky,
And carve tall elms' Corinthian capitals, —
When sometimes, as our tiny hatchets ply,
Men say, the tapping woodpecker is nigh.

XLIX.

" Sometimes we scoop the squirrel's hollow cell,
And sometimes carve quaint letters on trees' rind,
That haply some lone musing wight may spell
Dainty Aminta, — Gentle Rosalind, —
Or chastest Laura, — sweetly call'd to mind
In sylvan solitudes, ere he lies down; —
And sometimes we enrich gray stems, with twined
And vagrant ivy, — or rich moss, whose brown
Burns into gold as the warm sun goes down.

L.

" And, lastly, for mirth's sake and Christmas cheer,
We bear the seedling berries, for increase,
To graft the Druid oaks, from year to year,
Careful that misletoe may never cease ; —
Wherefore, if thou dost prize the shady peace
Of sombre forests, or to see light break
Through sylvan cloisters, and in spring release
Thy spirit amongst leaves from careful ake,
Spare us our lives for the Green Dryad's sake."

LI.

Then Saturn, with a frown : — " Go forth, and fell
Oak for your coffins, and thenceforth lay by
Your axes for the rust, and bid farewell
To all sweet birds, and the blue peeps of sky
Through tangled branches, for ye shall not spy
The next green generation of the tree ;
But hence with the dead leaves, whene'er they fly, —
Which in the bleak air I would rather see,
Than flights of the most tuneful birds that be.

LII.

" For I dislike all prime, and verdant pets,
Ivy except, that on the aged wall
Preys with its worm-like roots, and daily frets
The crumbled tower it seems to league withal,
King-like, worn down by its own coronal: —
Neither in forest haunts love I to won,
Before the golden plumage 'gins to fall,
And leaves the brown bleak limbs with few leaves on,
Or bare — like Nature in her skeleton.

LIII.

" For then sit I amongst the crooked boughs,
Wooing dull Memory with kindred sighs;
And there in rustling nuptials we espouse,
Smit by the sadness in each other's eyes; —
But Hope must have green bowers and blue skies,
And must be courted with the gauds of spring;
Whilst Youth leans god-like on her lap, and cries,
What shall we always do, but love and sing? —
And Time is reckon'd a discarded thing."

LIV.

Here in my dream it made me fret to see
How Puck, the antic, all this dreary while
Had blithely jested with calamity,
With mistim'd mirth mocking the doleful style
Of his sad comrades, till it raised my bile
To see him so reflect their grief aside,
Turning their solemn looks to half a smile —
Like a straight stick shown crooked in the tide; —
But soon a novel advocate I spied.

LV.

Quoth he — "We teach all natures to fulfil
Their fore-appointed crafts, and instincts meet, —
The bee's sweet alchemy, — the spider's skill, —
The pismire's care to garner up his wheat, —
And rustic masonry to swallows fleet, —
The lapwing's cunning to preserve her nest, —
But most, that lesser pelican, the sweet
And shrilly ruddock, with its bleeding breast,
Its tender pity of poor babes distrest.

LVI.

" Sometimes we cast our shapes, and in sleek skins
Delve with the timid mole, that aptly delves
From our example; so the spider spins,
And eke the silk-worm, pattern'd by ourselves:
Sometimes we travail on the summer shelves
Of early bees, and busy toils commence,
Watch'd of wise men, that know not we are elves,
But gaze and marvel at our stretch of sense,
And praise our human-like intelligence.

LVII.

" Wherefore, by thy delight in that old tale,
And plaintive dirges the late robins sing,
What time the leaves are scatter'd by the gale,
Mindful of that old forest burying; —
As thou dost love to watch each tiny thing,
For whom our craft most curiously contrives,
If thou hast caught a bee upon the wing,
To take his honey-bag, — spare us our lives,
And we will pay the ransom in full hives."

LVIII.

" Now by my glass," quoth Time, " ye do offend
In teaching the brown bees that careful lore,
And frugal ants, whose millions would have end,
But they lay up for need a timely store,
And travail with the seasons evermore;
Whereas Great Mammoth long hath pass'd away,
And none but I can tell what hide he wore;
Whilst purblind men, the creatures of a day,
In riddling wonder his great bones survey."

LIX.

Then came an elf, right beauteous to behold,
Whose coat was like a brooklet that the sun
Hath all embroider'd with its crooked gold,
It was so quaintly wrought, and overrun
With spangled traceries, — most meet for one
That was a warden of the pearly streams; —
And as he stept out of the shadows dun,
His jewels sparkled in the pale moon's gleams,
And shot into the air their pointed beams.

LX.

Quoth he, — " We bear the cold and silver keys
Of bubbling springs and fountains, that below
Course thro' the veiny earth, — which when they freeze
Into hard crysolites, we bid to flow,
Creeping like subtle snakes, when, as they go,
We guide their windings to melodious falls,
At whose soft murmurings, so sweet and low,
Poets have tun'd their smoothest madrigals,
To sing to ladies in their banquet halls.

LXI.

" And when the hot sun with his steadfast heat
Parches the river god, — whose dusty urn
Drips miserly, till soon his crystal feet
Against his pebbly floor wax faint and burn,
And languid fish, unpois'd, grow sick and yearn, —
Then scoop we hollows in some sandy nook,
And little channels dig, wherein we turn
The thread-worn rivulet, that all forsook
The Naiad-lily, pining for her brook.

LXII.

" Wherefore, by thy delight in cool green meads,
With living sapphires daintily inlaid, —
In all soft songs of waters and their reeds, —
And all reflections in a streamlet made,
Haply of thy own love, that, disarray'd,
Kills the fair lily with a livelier white, —
By silver trouts upspringing from green shade,
And winking stars reduplicate at night,
Spare us, poor ministers to such delight."

LXIII.

Howbeit his pleading and his gentle looks
Mov'd not the spiteful Shade: — Quoth he, "Your taste
Shoots wide of mine, for I despise the brooks
And slavish rivulets that run to waste
In noontide sweats, or, like poor vassals, haste
To swell the vast dominion of the sea,
In whose great presence I am held disgrac'd,
And neighbour'd with a king that rivals me
In ancient might and hoary majesty.

LXIV.

" Whereas I rul'd in Chaos, and still keep
The awful secrets of that ancient dearth,
Before the briny fountains of the deep
Brimm'd up the hollow cavities of earth; —
I saw each trickling Sea-God at his birth,
Each pearly Naiad with her oozy locks,
And infant Titans of enormous girth,
Whose huge young feet yet stumbled on the rocks,
Stunning the early world with frequent shocks.

LXV.

" Where now is Titan, with his cumbrous brood,
That scar'd the world? — By this sharp scythe they fell,
And half the sky was curdled with their blood:
So have all primal giants sigh'd farewell.
No Wardens now by sedgy fountains dwell,
Nor pearly Naiads. All their days are done
That strove with Time, untimely, to excel;
Wherefore I raz'd their progenies, and none
But my great shadow intercepts the sun!"

LXVI.

Then saith the timid Fay — " Oh, mighty Time !
Well hast thou wrought the cruel Titans' fall,
For they were stain'd with many a bloody crime :
Great giants work great wrongs, — but we are small,
For love goes lowly ; — but Oppression 's tall,
And with surpassing strides goes foremost still
Where love indeed can hardly reach at all ;
Like a poor dwarf o'erburthen'd with good will,
That labours to efface the tracks of ill. —

LXVII.

" Man even strives with Man, but we eschew
The guilty feud, and all fierce strifes abhor ;
Nay, we are gentle as sweet heaven's dew,
Beside the red and horrid drops of war,
Weeping the cruel hates men battle for,
Which worldly bosoms nourish in our spite :
For in the gentle breast we ne'er withdraw,
But only when all love hath taken flight,
And youth's warm gracious heart is harden'd quite.

LXVIII.

" So are our gentle natures intertwin'd
With sweet humanities, and closely knit
In kindly sympathy with human kind.
Witness how we befriend, with elfin wit,
All hopeless maids and lovers, — nor omit
Magical succours unto hearts forlorn: —
We charm man's life, and do not perish it; —
So judge us by the helps we show'd this morn,
To one who held his wretched days in scorn.

LXIX.

" 'Twas nigh sweet Amwell; — for the Queen had task'd
Our skill to-day amidst the silver Lea,
Whereon the noontide sun had not yet bask'd;
Wherefore some patient man we thought to see,
Planted in moss-grown rushes to the knee,
Beside the cloudy margin cold and dim; —
Howbeit no patient fisherman was he
That cast his sudden shadow from the brim,
Making us leave our toils to gaze on him.

LXX.

" His face was ashy pale, and leaden care
Had sunk the levell'd arches of his brow,
Once bridges for his joyous thoughts to fare
Over those melancholy springs and slow,
That from his piteous eyes began to flow,
And fell anon into the chilly stream ;
Which, as his mimick'd image show'd below,
Wrinkled his face with many a needless seam,
Making grief sadder in its own esteem.

LXXI.

" And lo ! upon the air we saw him stretch
His passionate arms ; and, in a wayward strain,
He 'gan to elegize that fellow wretch
That with mute gestures answer'd him again,
Saying, ' Poor slave, how long wilt thou remain
Life's sad weak captive in a prison strong,
Hoping with tears to rust away thy chain,
In bitter servitude to worldly wrong ? —
Thou wear'st that mortal livery too long !'

LXXII.

"This, with more spleenful speeches and some tears,
When he had spent upon the imaged wave,
Speedily I conven'd my elfin peers
Under the lily-cups, that we might save
This woeful mortal from a wilful grave
By shrewd diversions of his mind's regret,
Seeing he was mere melancholy's slave,
That sank wherever a dark cloud he met,
And straight was tangled in her secret net.

LXXIII.

"Therefore, as still he watch'd the water's flow,
Daintily we transform'd, and with bright fins
Came glancing through the gloom; some from below
Rose like dim fancies when a dream begins,
Snatching the light upon their purple skins;
Then under the broad leaves made slow retire:
One like a golden galley bravely wins
Its radiant course, — another glows like fire, —
Making that wayward man our pranks admire.

LXXIV.

" And so he banish'd thought, and quite forgot
All contemplation of that wretched face;
And so we wil'd him from that lonely spot
Along the river's brink; till, by heaven's grace,
He met a gentle haunter of the place,
Full of sweet wisdom gather'd from the brooks,
Who there discuss'd his melancholy case
With wholesome texts learn'd from kind nature's books,
Meanwhile he newly trimm'd his lines and hooks."

LXXV.

Herewith the Fairy ceased. Quoth Ariel now —
" Let me remember how I sav'd a man,
Whose fatal noose was fasten'd on a bough,
Intended to abridge his sad life's span;
For haply I was by when he began
His stern soliloquy in life's dispraise,
And overheard his melancholy plan,
How he had made a vow to end his days,
And therefore follow'd him in all his ways,

LXXVI.

"Through brake and tangled copse, for much he loath'd
All populous haunts, and roam'd in forests rude,
To hide himself from man. But I had cloth'd
My delicate limbs with plumes, and still pursued,
Where only foxes and wild cats intrude,
Till we were come beside an ancient tree
Late blasted by a storm. Here he renew'd
His loud complaints, — choosing that spot to be
The scene of his last horrid tragedy.

LXXVII.

" It was a wild and melancholy glen,
Made gloomy by tall firs and cypress dark,
Whose roots, like any bones of buried men,
Push'd through the rotten sod for fear's remark;
A hundred horrid stems, jagged and stark,
Wrestled with crooked arms in hideous fray,
Besides sleek ashes with their dappled bark,
Like crafty serpents climbing for a prey,
With many blasted oaks moss-grown and grey.

LXXVIII.

" But here upon his final desperate clause
Suddenly I pronounc'd so sweet a strain,
Like a pang'd nightingale, it made him pause,
Till half the frenzy of his grief was slain,
The sad remainder oozing from his brain
In timely ecstasies of healing tears,
Which through his ardent eyes began to drain ; —
Meanwhile the deadly Fates unclos'd their shears : —
So pity me and all my fated peers !"

LXXIX.

Thus Ariel ended, and was some time hush'd :
When with the hoary shape a fresh tongue pleads,
And red as rose the gentle Fairy blush'd
To read the record of her own good deeds : —
" It chanc'd," quoth she, " in seeking through the meads
For honied cowslips, sweetest in the morn,
Whilst yet the buds were hung with dewy beads,
And Echo answer'd to the huntsman's horn,
We found a babe left in the swarths forlorn.

LXXX.

" A little, sorrowful, deserted thing,
Begot of love, and yet no love begetting;
Guiltless of shame, and yet for shame to wring;
And too soon banish'd from a mother's petting,
To churlish nurture and the wide world's fretting,
For alien pity and unnatural care; —
Alas! to see how the cold dew kept wetting
His childish coats, and dabbled all his hair,
Like gossamers across his forehead fair.

LXXXI.

" His pretty pouting mouth, witless of speech,
Lay half-way open like a rose-lipp'd shell;
And his young cheek was softer than a peach,
Whereon his tears, for roundness, could not dwell,
But quickly roll'd themselves to pearls, and fell,
Some on the grass, and some against his hand,
Or haply wander'd to the dimpled well,
Which love beside his mouth had sweetly plann'd,
Yet not for tears, but mirth and smilings bland.

LXXXII.

" Pity it was to see those frequent tears
Falling regardless from his friendless eyes;
There was such beauty in those twin blue spheres,
As any mother's heart might leap to prize;
Blue were they, like the zenith of the skies
Soften'd betwixt two clouds, both clear and mild;—
Just touch'd with thought, and yet not over wise,
They show'd the gentle spirit of a child,
Not yet by care or any craft defil'd.

LXXXIII.

" Pity it was to see the ardent sun
Scorching his helpless limbs — it shone so warm;
For kindly shade or shelter he had none,
Nor mother's gentle breast, come fair or storm.
Meanwhile I bade my pitying mates transform
Like grasshoppers, and then, with shrilly cries,
All round the infant noisily we swarm,
Haply some passing rustic to advise —
Whilst providential Heav'n our care espies,

LXXXIV.

" And sends full soon a tender-hearted hind,
Who, wond'ring at our loud unusual note,
Strays curiously aside, and so doth find
The orphan child laid in the grass remote,
And laps the foundling in his russet coat,
Who thence was nurtur'd in his kindly cot:—
But how he prosper'd let proud London quote,
How wise, how rich, and how renown'd he got,
And chief of all her citizens, I wot.

LXXXV.

" Witness his goodly vessels on the Thames,
Whose holds were fraught with costly merchandise,—
Jewels from Ind, and pearls for courtly dames,
And gorgeous silks that Samarcand supplies:
Witness that Royal Bourse he bade arise,
The mart of merchants from the East and West;
Whose slender summit, pointing to the skies,
Still bears, in token of his grateful breast,
The tender grasshopper, his chosen crest—

LXXXVI.

" The tender grasshopper, his chosen crest,
That all the summer, with a tuneful wing,
Makes merry chirpings in its grassy nest,
Inspirited with dew to leap and sing : —
So let us also live, eternal King !
Partakers of the green and pleasant earth : —
Pity it is to slay the meanest thing,
That, like a mote, shines in the smile of mirth : —
Enough there is of joy's decrease and dearth !

LXXXVII.

" Enough of pleasure, and delight, and beauty,
Perish'd and gone, and hasting to decay ; —
Enough to sadden even thee, whose duty
Or spite it is to havoc and to slay :
Too many a lovely race raz'd quite away,
Hath left large gaps in life and human loving : —
Here then begin thy cruel war to stay,
And spare fresh sighs, and tears, and groans, reproving
Thy desolating hand for our removing."

LXXXVIII.

Now here I heard a shrill and sudden cry,
And, looking up, I saw the antic Puck
Grappling with Time, who clutch'd him like a fly,
Victim of his own sport, — the jester's luck!
He, whilst his fellows griev'd, poor wight, had stuck
His freakish gauds upon the Ancient's brow,
And now his ear, and now his beard, would pluck;
Whereas the angry churl had snatch'd him now,
Crying, " Thou impish mischief, who art thou?"

LXXXIX.

" Alas!" quoth Puck, " a little random elf,
Born in the sport of nature, like a weed,
For simple sweet enjoyment of myself,
But for no other purpose, worth, or need;
And yet withal of a most happy breed; —
And there is Robin Goodfellow besides,
My partner dear in many a prankish deed
To make dame Laughter hold her jolly sides,
Like merry mummers twain on holy tides.

XC.

" 'Tis we that bob the angler's idle cork,
Till e'en the patient man breathes half a curse;
We steal the morsel from the gossip's fork,
And curdling looks with secret straws disperse,
Or stop the sneezing chanter at mid verse:
And when an infant's beauty prospers ill,
We change, some mothers say, the child at nurse;
But any graver purpose to fulfil,
We have not wit enough, and scarce the will.

XCI.

" We never let the canker melancholy
To gather on our faces like a rust,
But gloss our features with some change of folly,
Taking life's fabled miseries on trust,
But only sorrowing when sorrow must:
We ruminate no sage's solemn cud,
But own ourselves a pinch of lively dust
To frisk upon a wind, — whereas the flood
Of tears would turn us into heavy mud.

XCII.

" Beshrew those sad interpreters of nature,
Who gloze her lively universal law,
As if she had not form'd our cheerful feature
To be so tickled with the slightest straw!
So let them vex their mumping mouths, and draw
The corners downward, like a wat'ry moon,
And deal in gusty sighs and rainy flaw —
We will not woo foul weather all too soon,
Or nurse November on the lap of June.

XCIII.

" For ours are winging sprites, like any bird,
That shun all stagnant settlements of grief;
And even in our rest our hearts are stirr'd,
Like insects settled on a dancing leaf: —
This is our small philosophy in brief,
Which thus to teach hath set me all agape:
But dost thou relish it? O hoary chief!
Unclasp thy crooked fingers from my nape,
And I will show thee many a pleasant scrape."

XCIV.

Then Saturn thus: — shaking his crooked blade
O'erhead, which made aloft a lightning flash
In all the fairies' eyes, dismally fray'd!
His ensuing voice came like the thunder crash —
Meanwhile the bolt shatters some pine or ash —
" Thou feeble, wanton, foolish, fickle thing!
Whom nought can frighten, sadden, or abash, —
To hope my solemn countenance to wring
To idiot smiles! — but I will prune thy wing!

XCV.

" Lo! this most awful handle of my scythe
Stood once a May-pole, with a flowery crown,
Which rustics danced around, and maidens blithe,
To wanton pipings; — but I pluck'd it down,
And robed the May Queen in a churchyard gown,
Turning her buds to rosemary and rue;
And all their merry minstrelsy did drown,
And laid each lusty leaper in the dew; —
So thou shalt fare — and every jovial crew!"

XCVI.

Here he lets go the struggling imp, to clutch
His mortal engine with each grisly hand,
Which frights the elfin progeny so much,
They huddle in a heap, and trembling stand
All round Titania, like the queen bee's band,
With sighs and tears and very shrieks of woe! —
Meanwhile, some moving argument I plann'd,
To make the stern Shade merciful, — when lo!
He drops his fatal scythe without a blow!

XCVII.

For, just at need, a timely Apparition
Steps in between, to bear the awful brunt;
Making him change his horrible position,
To marvel at this comer, brave and blunt,
That dares Time's irresistible affront,
Whose strokes have scarr'd even the gods of old; —
Whereas this seem'd a mortal, at mere hunt
For coneys, lighted by the moonshine cold,
Or stalker of stray deer, stealthy and bold.

XCVIII.

Who, turning to the small assembled fays,
Doffs to the lily queen his courteous cap,
And holds her beauty for a while in gaze,
With bright eyes kindling at this pleasant hap;
And thence upon the fair moon's silver map,
As if in question of this magic chance,
Laid like a dream upon the green earth's lap;
And then upon old Saturn turns askance,
Exclaiming, with a glad and kindly glance: —

XCIX.

" Oh, these be Fancy's revellers by night!
Stealthy companions of the downy moth —
Diana's motes, that flit in her pale light,
Shunners of sunbeams in diurnal sloth; —
These be the feasters on night's silver cloth, —
The gnat with shrilly trump is their convener,
Forth from their flowery chambers, nothing loth,
With lulling tunes to charm the air serener,
Or dance upon the grass to make it greener.

C.

" These be the pretty genii of the flow'rs,
Daintily fed with honey and pure dew —
Midsummer's phantoms in her dreaming hours,
King Oberon, and all his merry crew,
The darling puppets of romance's view;
Fairies, and sprites, and goblin elves we call them,
Famous for patronage of lovers true; —
No harm they act, neither shall harm befall them,
So do not thus with crabbed frowns appal them."

CI.

O what a cry was Saturn's then! — it made
The fairies quake. " What care I for their pranks,
However they may lovers choose to aid,
Or dance their roundelays on flow'ry banks? —
Long must they dance before they earn my thanks, —
So step aside, to some far safer spot,
Whilst with my hungry scythe I mow their ranks,
And leave them in the sun, like weeds, to rot,
And with the next day's sun to be forgot."

CII.

Anon, he raised afresh his weapon keen;
But still the gracious Shade disarm'd his aim,
Stepping with brave alacrity between,
And made his sere arm powerless and tame.
His be perpetual glory, for the shame
Of hoary Saturn in that grand defeat! —
But I must tell, how here Titania came
With all her kneeling lieges, to entreat
His kindly succour, in sad tones, but sweet.

CIII.

Saying, "Thou seest a wretched queen before thee,
The fading power of a failing land,
Who for her kingdom kneeleth to implore thee,
Now menac'd by this tyrant's spoiling hand;
No one but thee can hopefully withstand
That crooked blade, he longeth so to lift.
I pray thee blind him with his own vile sand,
Which only times all ruins by its drift,
Or prune his eagle wings that are so swift.

CIV

" Or take him by that sole and grizzled tuft,
That hangs upon his bald and barren crown;
And we will sing to see him so rebuff'd,
And lend our little mights to pull him down,
And make brave sport of his malicious frown,
For all his boastful mockery o'er men.
For thou wast born I know for this renown,
By my most magical and inward ken,
That readeth ev'n at Fate's forestalling pen.

CV.

" Nay, by the golden lustre of thine eye,
And by thy brow's most fair and ample span,
Thought's glorious palace, fram'd for fancies high,
And by thy cheek thus passionately wan,
I know the signs of an immortal man, —
Nature's chief darling, and illustrious mate,
Destin'd to foil old Death's oblivious plan,
And shine untarnish'd by the fogs of Fate,
Time's famous rival till the final date!

CVI.

" O shield us then from this usurping Time,
And we will visit thee in moonlight dreams;
And teach thee tunes, to wed unto thy rhyme,
And dance about thee in all midnight gleams,
Giving thee glimpses of our magic schemes,
Such as no mortal's eye hath ever seen;
And, for thy love to us in our extremes,
Will ever keep thy chaplet fresh and green,
Such as no poet's wreath hath ever been!

CVII.

" And we 'll distil thee aromatic dews,
To charm thy sense, when there shall be no flow'rs;
And flavour'd syrops in thy drinks infuse,
And teach the nightingale to haunt thy bow'rs,
And with our games divert thy weariest hours,
With all that elfin wits can e'er devise.
And, this churl dead, there 'll be no hasting hours
To rob thee of thy joys, as now joy flies:" —
Here she was stopp'd by Saturn's furious cries.

CVIII.

Whom, therefore, the kind Shade rebukes anew,
Saying, " Thou haggard Sin, go forth, and scoop
Thy hollow coffin in some churchyard yew,
Or make th' autumnal flow'rs turn pale, and droop;
Or fell the bearded corn; till gleaners stoop
Under fat sheaves, — or blast the piny grove; —
But here thou shalt not harm this pretty groupe,
Whose lives are not so frail and feebly wove,
But leas'd on Nature's loveliness and love. .

CIX.

" 'Tis these that free the small entangled fly,
Caught in the venom'd spider's crafty snare; —
These be the petty surgeons that apply
The healing balsams to the wounded hare,
Bedded in bloody fern, no creature's care! —
These be providers for the orphan brood,
Whose tender mother hath been slain in air,
Quitting with gaping bill her darling's food,
Hard by the verge of her domestic wood.

CX.

" 'Tis these befriend the timid trembling stag,
When, with a bursting heart beset with fears,
He feels his saving speed begin to flag;
For then they quench the fatal taint with tears,
And prompt fresh shifts in his alarum'd ears,
So piteously they view all bloody morts;
Or if the gunner, with his arm, appears,
Like noisy pyes and jays, with harsh reports,
They warn the wild fowl of his deadly sports.

CXI.

" For these are kindly ministers of nature,
To soothe all covert hurts and dumb distress;
Pretty they be, and very small of stature, —
For mercy still consorts with littleness; —
Wherefore the sum of good is still the less,
And mischief grossest in this world of wrong; —
So do these charitable dwarfs redress
The tenfold ravages of giants strong,
To whom great malice and great might belong.

CXII.

" Likewise to them are Poets much beholden
For secret favours in the midnight glooms;
Brave Spenser quaff'd out of their goblets golden,
And saw their tables spread of prompt mushrooms,
And heard their horns of honeysuckle blooms
Sounding upon the air most soothing soft,
Like humming bees busy about the brooms, —
And glanc'd this fair queen's witchery full oft,
And in her magic wain soar'd far aloft.

CXIII.

" Nay I myself, though mortal, once was nurs'd
By fairy gossips, friendly at my birth,
And in my childish ear glib Mab rehears'd
Her breezy travels round our planet's girth,
Telling me wonders of the moon and earth;
My gramarye at her grave lap I conn'd,
Where Puck hath been conven'd to make me mirth;
I have had from Queen Titania tokens fond,
And toy'd with Oberon's permitted wand.

CXIV.

" With figs and plums and Persian dates they fed me,
And delicate cates after my sunset meal,
And took me by my childish hand, and led me
By craggy rocks crested with keeps of steel,
Whose awful bases deep dark woods conceal,
Staining some dead lake with their verdant dyes:
And when the West sparkled at Phœbus' wheel,
With fairy euphrasy they purg'd mine eyes,
To let me see their cities in the skies.

CXV.

" 'Twas they first school'd my young imagination
To take its flights like any new-fledg'd bird,
And show'd the span of winged meditation
Stretch'd wider than things grossly seen or heard.
With sweet swift Ariel how I soar'd and stirr'd
The fragrant blooms of spiritual bow'rs!
'Twas they endear'd what I have still preferr'd,
Nature's blest attributes and balmy pow'rs,
Her hills and vales and brooks, sweet birds and flow'rs!

CXVI.

" Wherefore with all true loyalty and duty
Will I regard them in my honouring rhyme,
With love for love, and homages to beauty,
And magic thoughts gather'd in night's cool clime,
With studious verse trancing the dragon Time,
Strong as old Merlin's necromantic spells;
So these dear monarchs of the summer's prime
Shall live unstartled by his dreadful yells,
Till shrill larks warn them to their flowery cells."

CXVII.

Look how a poison'd man turns livid black,
Drugg'd with a cup of deadly hellebore,
That sets his horrid features all at rack, —
So seem'd these words into the ear to pour
Of ghastly Saturn, answering with a roar
Of mortal pain and spite and utmost rage,
Wherewith his grisly arm he rais'd once more,
And bade the cluster'd sinews all engage,
As if at one fell stroke to wreck an age.

CXVIII.

Whereas the blade flash'd on the dinted ground,
Down through his steadfast foe, yet made no scar
On that immortal Shade, or death-like wound;
But Time was long benumb'd, and stood ajar,
And then with baffled rage took flight afar,
To weep his hurt in some Cimmerian gloom,
Or meaner fames (like mine) to mock and mar,
Or sharp his scythe for royal strokes of doom,
Whetting its edge on some old Cæsar's tomb.

CXIX.

Howbeit he vanish'd in the forest shade,
Distantly heard as if some grumbling pard,
And, like Narcissus, to a sound decay'd;—
Meanwhile the fays cluster'd the gracious Bard,
The darling centre of their dear regard:
Besides of sundry dances on the green,
Never was mortal man so brightly starr'd,
Or won such pretty homages, I ween.
"Nod to him, Elves!" cries the melodious queen.

CXX.

" Nod to him, Elves, and flutter round about him,
And quite enclose him with your pretty crowd,
And touch him lovingly, for that, without him,
The silk-worm now had spun our dreary shroud; -
But he hath all dispers'd death's tearful cloud,
And Time's dread effigy scar'd quite away:
Bow to him then; as though to me ye bow'd,
And his dear wishes prosper and obey
Wherever love and wit can find a way!

CXXI.

" 'Noint him with fairy dews of magic savours,
Shaken from orient buds still pearly wet,
Roses and spicy pinks, — and, of all favours,
Plant in his walks the purple violet,
And meadow-sweet under the hedges set,
To mingle breaths with dainty eglantine
And honeysuckles sweet, — nor yet forget
Some pastoral flowery chaplets to entwine,
To vie the thoughts about his brow benign!

CXXII.

" Let no wild things astonish him or fear him,
But tell them all how mild he is of heart,
Till e'en the timid hares go frankly near him,
And eke the dappled does, yet never start;
Nor shall their fawns into the thickets dart,
Nor wrens forsake their nests among the leaves,
Nor speckled thrushes flutter far apart; —
But bid the sacred swallow haunt his eaves,
To guard his roof from lightning and from thieves.

CXXIII.

" Or when he goes the nimble squirrel's visitor,
Let the brown hermit bring his hoarded nuts,
For, tell him, this is Nature's kind Inquisitor, —
Though man keeps cautious doors that conscience shuts,
For conscious wrong all curious quest rebuts, —
Nor yet shall bees uncase their jealous stings,
However he may watch their straw-built huts; —
So let him learn the crafts of all small things,
Which he will hint most aptly when he sings."

CXXIV.

Here she leaves off, and with a graceful hand
Waves thrice three splendid circles round his head;
Which, though deserted by the radiant wand,
Wears still the glory which her waving shed,
Such as erst crown'd the old Apostle's head,
To show the thoughts there harbour'd were divine,
And on immortal contemplations fed: —
Goodly it was to see that glory shine
Around a brow so lofty and benign!

CXXV.

Goodly it was to see the elfin brood
Contend for kisses of his gentle hand,
That had their mortal enemy withstood,
And stay'd their lives, fast ebbing with the sand.
Long while this strife engag'd the pretty band;
But now bold Chanticleer, from farm to farm,
Challeng'd the dawn creeping o'er eastern land,
And well the fairies knew that shrill alarm,
Which sounds the knell of every elfish charm.

CXXVI.

And soon the rolling mist, that 'gan arise
From plashy mead and undiscover'd stream,
Earth's morning incense to the early skies,
Crept o'er the failing landscape of my dream.
Soon faded then the Phantom of my theme —
A shapeless shade, that fancy disavow'd,
And shrank to nothing in the mist extreme.
Then flew Titania, — and her little crowd,
Like flocking linnets, vanish'd in a cloud.

HERO AND LEANDER.

TO

S. T. COLERIDGE, Esq.

It is not with a hope my feeble praise
Can add one moment's honour to thy own,
That with thy mighty name I grace these lays;
I seek to glorify myself alone:
For that some precious favour thou hast shown
To my endeavour in a by-gone time,
And by this token, I would have it known
Thou art my friend, and friendly to my rhyme!
It is my dear ambition now to climb
Still higher in thy thought, — if my bold pen
May thrust on contemplations more sublime. —
But I am thirsty for thy praise, for when
We gain applauses from the great in name,
We seem to be partakers of *their* fame.

HERO AND LEANDER.

I.

Oh Bards of old! what sorrows have ye sung,
And tragic stories, chronicled in stone,—
Sad Philomel restor'd her ravish'd tongue,
And transform'd Niobe in dumbness shown;
Sweet Sappho on her love for ever calls,
And Hero on the drown'd Leander falls!

II.

Was it that spectacles of sadder plights,
Should make our blisses relish the more high?
Then all fair dames, and maidens, and true knights,
Whose flourish'd fortunes prosper in Love's eye,
Weep here, unto a tale of ancient grief,
Trac'd from the course of an old bas-relief.

III.

There stands Abydos! — here is Sestos' steep,
Hard by the gusty margin of the sea,
Where sprinkling waves continually do leap;
And that is where those famous lovers be,
A builded gloom shot up into the grey,
As if the first tall watch-tow'r of the day.

IV.

Lo! how the lark soars upward and is gone;
Turning a spirit as he nears the sky,
His voice is heard, though body there is none,
And rain-like music scatters from on high;
But Love would follow with a falcon spite,
To pluck the minstrel from his dewy height.

V.

For Love hath fram'd a ditty of regrets,
Tun'd to the hollow sobbings on the shore,
A vexing sense, that with like music frets,
And chimes this dismal burthen o'er and o'er,
Saying, Leander's joys are past and spent,
Like stars extinguish'd in the firmament.

VI.

For ere the golden crevices of morn
Let in those regal luxuries of light,
Which all the variable east adorn,
And hang rich fringes on the skirts of night,
Leander, weaning from sweet Hero's side,
Must leave a widow where he found a bride.

VII.

Hark! how the billows beat upon the sand!
Like pawing steeds impatient of delay;
Meanwhile their rider, ling'ring on the land,
Dallies with love, and holds farewell at bay
A too short span. — How tedious slow is grief!
But parting renders time both sad and brief.

VIII.

"Alas (he sigh'd), that this first glimpsing light,
Which makes the wide world tenderly appear,
Should be the burning signal for my flight,
From all the world's best image, which is here;
Whose very shadow, in my fond compare,
Shines far more bright than Beauty's self elsewhere."

IX.

Their cheeks are white as blossoms of the dark,
Whose leaves close up and show the outward pale,
And those fair mirrors where their joys did spark,
All dim and tarnish'd with a dreary veil,
No more to kindle till the night's return,
Like stars replenish'd at Joy's golden urn.

X.

Ev'n thus they creep into the spectral grey,
That cramps the landscape in its narrow brim,
As when two shadows by old Lethe stray,
He clasping her, and she entwining him;
Like trees wind-parted that embrace anon,
True love so often goes before 'tis gone.

XI.

For what rich merchant but will pause in fear,
To trust his wealth to the unsafe abyss?
So Hero dotes upon her treasure here,
And sums the loss with many an anxious kiss,
Whilst her fond eyes grow dizzy in her head,
Fear aggravating fear with shows of dread.

XII.

She thinks how many have been sunk and drown'd,
And spies their snow-white bones below the deep,
Then calls huge congregated monsters round,
And plants a rock wherever he would leap;
Anon she dwells on a fantastic dream,
Which she interprets of that fatal stream.

XIII.

Saying, "That honey'd fly I saw was thee,
Which lighted on a water-lily's cup,
When, lo! the flow'r, enamour'd of my bee,
Closed on him suddenly and lock'd him up,
And he was smother'd in her drenching dew;
Therefore this day thy drowning I shall rue."

XIV.

But next, remembering her virgin fame,
She clips him in her arms and bids him go,
But seeing him break loose, repents her shame,
And plucks him back upon her bosom's snow;
And tears unfix her iced resolve again,
As steadfast frosts are thaw'd by show'rs of rain.

XV.

O for a type of parting! — Love to love
Is like the fond attraction of two spheres,
Which needs a godlike effort to remove,
And then sink down their sunny atmospheres,
In rain and darkness on each ruin'd heart,
Nor yet their melodies will sound apart.

XVI.

So brave Leander sunders from his bride;
The wrenching pang disparts his soul in twain;
Half stays with her, half goes towards the tide, —
And life must ache, until they join again.
Now would'st thou know the wideness of the wound,
Mete every step he takes upon the ground.

XVII.

And for the agony and bosom-throe,
Let it be measur'd by the wide vast air,
For that is infinite, and so is woe,
Since parted lovers breathe it every where.
Look how it heaves Leander's labouring chest,
Panting, at poise, upon a rocky crest!

XVIII.

From which he leaps into the scooping brine,
That shocks his bosom with a double chill;
Because, all hours, till the slow sun's decline,
That cold divorcer will betwixt them still;
Wherefore he likens it to Styx' foul tide,
Where life grows death upon the other side.

XIX.

Then sadly he confronts his two-fold toil
Against rude waves and an unwilling mind,
Wishing, alas! with the stout rower's toil,
That like a rower he might gaze behind,
And watch that lonely statue he hath left
On her bleak summit, weeping and bereft!

XX.

Yet turning oft, he sees her troubled locks
Pursue him still the furthest that they may;
Her marble arms that overstretch the rocks,
And her pale passion'd hands that seem to pray
In dumb petition to the gods above:
Love prays devoutly when it prays for love!

XXI.

Then with deep sighs he blows away the wave,
That hangs superfluous tears upon his cheek,
And bans his labour like a hopeless slave,
That, chain'd in hostile galley, faint and weak,
Plies on despairing through the restless foam,
Thoughtful of his lost love, and far-off home.

XXII.

The drowsy mist before him chill and dank,
Like a dull lethargy o'erleans the sea,
Where he rows on against the utter blank,
Steering as if to dim eternity, —
Like Love's frail ghost departing with the dawn;
A failing shadow in the twilight drawn.

XXIII.

And soon is gone, — or nothing but a faint
And failing image in the eye of thought,
That mocks his model with an after-paint,
And stains an atom like the shape she sought;
Then with her earnest vows she hopes to fee,
The old and hoary majesty of sea.

XXIV.

" O King of waves, and brother of high Jove,
Preserve my sumless venture there afloat;
A woman's heart, and its whole wealth of love,
Are all embark'd upon that little boat;
Nay, but two loves, two lives, a double fate,
A perilous voyage for so dear a freight.

XXV.

" If impious mariners be stain'd with crime,
Shake not in awful rage thy hoary locks;
Lay by thy storms until another time,
Lest my frail bark be dash'd against the rocks:
O rather smooth thy deeps, that he may fly
Like Love himself, upon a seeming sky!

XXVI.

" Let all thy herded monsters sleep beneath,
Nor gore him with crook'd tusks, or wreathed horns,
Let no fierce sharks destroy him with their teeth,
Nor spine-fish wound him with their venom'd thorns;
But if he faint, and timely succour lack,
Let ruthful dolphins rest him on their back.

XXVII.

"Let no false dimpling whirlpools suck him in,
Nor slimy quicksands smother his sweet breath;
Let no jagg'd corals tear his tender skin,
Nor mountain billows bury him in death;" —
And with that thought forestalling her own fears,
She drown'd his painted image in her tears.

XXVIII.

By this, the climbing sun, with rest repair'd,
Look'd through the gold embrasures of the sky,
And ask'd the drowsy world how she had far'd; —
The drowsy world shone brighten'd in reply;
And smiling off her fogs, his slanting beam
Spied young Leander in the middle stream.

XXIX.

His face was pallid, but the hectic morn
Had hung a lying crimson on his cheeks,
And slanderous sparkles in his eyes forlorn;
So death lies ambush'd in consumptive streaks;
But inward grief was writhing o'er its task,
As heart-sick jesters weep behind the mask.

XXX.

He thought of Hero and the lost delight,
Her last embracings, and the space between;
He thought of Hero and the future night,
Her speechless rapture and enamour'd mien,
When, lo! before him, scarce two galleys' space,
His thought's confronted with another face!

XXXI.

Her aspect's like a moon divinely fair,
But makes the midnight darker that it lies on;
'Tis so beclouded with her coal-black hair
That densely skirts her luminous horizon,
Making her doubly fair, thus darkly set,
As marble lies advantag'd upon jet.

XXXII.

She's all too bright, too argent, and too pale,
To be a woman; — but a woman's double,
Reflected on the wave so faint and frail,
She tops the billows like an air-blown bubble;
Or dim creation of a morning dream,
Fair as the wave-bleach'd lily of the stream.

XXXIII.

The very rumour strikes his seeing dead:
Great beauty like great fear first stuns the sense:
He knows not if her lips be blue or red,
Nor of her eyes can give true evidence:
Like murder's witness swooning in the court,
His sight falls senseless by its own report.

XXXIV.

Anon resuming, it declares her eyes
Are tinct with azure, like two crystal wells
That drink the blue complexion of the skies,
Or pearls outpeeping from their silvery shells:
Her polish'd brow, it is an ample plain,
To lodge vast contemplations of the main.

XXXV.

Her lips might corals seem, but corals near,
Stray through her hair like blossoms on a bower;
And o'er the weaker red still domineer,
And make it pale by tribute to more power;
Her rounded cheeks are of still paler hue,
Touch'd by the bloom of water, tender blue.

XXXVI.

Thus he beholds her rocking on the water,
Under the glossy umbrage of her hair,
Like pearly Amphitrite's fairest daughter
Naiad, or Nereid, — or Syren fair,
Mislodging music in her pitiless breast,
A nightingale within a falcon's nest.

XXXVII.

They say there be such maidens in the deep,
Charming poor mariners, that all too near
By mortal lullabies fall dead asleep,
As drowsy men are poison'd through the ear;
Therefore Leander's fears begin to urge,
This snowy swan is come to sing his dirge.

XXXVIII.

At which he falls into a deadly chill,
And strains his eyes upon her lips apart;
Fearing each breath to feel that prelude shrill,
Pierce through his marrow, like a breath-blown dart
Shot sudden from an Indian's hollow cane,
With mortal venom fraught, and fiery pain.

XXXIX.

Here then, poor wretch, how he begins to crowd
A thousand thoughts within a pulse's space;
There seem'd so brief a pause of life allow'd,
His mind stretch'd universal, to embrace
The whole wide world, in an extreme farewell,—
A moment's musing — but an age to tell.

XL.

For there stood Hero, widow'd at a glance,
The foreseen sum of many a tedious fact,
Pale cheeks, dim eyes, and wither'd countenance;
A wasted ruin that no wasting lack'd;
Time's tragic consequents ere time began,
A world of sorrow in a tear-drop's span.

XLI.

A moment's thinking, is an hour in words;—
An hour of words is little for some woes;
Too little breathing a long life affords,
For love to paint itself by perfect shows;
Then let his love and grief unwrong'd lie dumb,
Whilst Fear, and that it fears, together come.

XLII.

As when the crew, hard by some jutty cape,
Struck pale and panick'd by the billows' roar,
Lay by all timely measures of escape,
And let their bark go driving on the shore;
So fray'd Leander, drifting to his wreck,
Gazing on Scylla, falls upon her neck.

XLIII.

For he hath all forgot the swimmer's art,
The rower's cunning, and the pilot's skill,
Letting his arms fall down in languid part,
Sway'd by the waves, and nothing by his will,
Till soon he jars against that glossy skin,
Solid like glass, though seemingly as thin.

XLIV.

Lo! how she startles at the warning shock,
And straightway girds him to her radiant breast,
More like his safe smooth harbour than his rock;
Poor wretch, he is so faint and toil-opprest,
He cannot loose him from his grappling foe,
Whether for love or hate, she lets not go.

XLV.

His eyes are blinded with the sleety brine,
His ears are deafen'd with the wildering noise;
He asks the purpose of her fell design,
But foamy waves choke up his struggling voice;
Under the ponderous sea his body dips,
And Hero's name dies bubbling on his lips.

XLVI.

Look how a man is lower'd to his grave;
A yearning hollow in the green earth's lap;
So he is sunk into the yawning wave,
The plunging sea fills up the watery gap;
Anon he is all gone, and nothing seen,
But likeness of green turf and hillocks green.

XLVII.

And where he swam, the constant sun lies sleeping,
Over the verdant plain that makes his bed;
And all the noisy waves go freshly leaping,
Like gamesome boys over the churchyard dead;
The light in vain keeps looking for his face,
Now screaming sea-fowl settle in his place.

XLVIII.

Yet weep and watch for him though all in vain!
Ye moaning billows, seek him as ye wander!
Ye gazing sunbeams, look for him again!
Ye winds, grow hoarse with asking for Leander!
Ye did but spare him for more cruel rape,
Sea-storm and ruin in a female shape!

XLIX.

She says 'tis love hath bribed her to this deed,
The glancing of his eyes did so bewitch her,
O bootless theft! unprofitable meed!
Love's treasury is sack'd, but she no richer;
The sparkles of his eyes are cold and dead,
And all his golden looks are turn'd to lead!

L.

She holds the casket, but her simple hand
Hath spill'd its dearest jewel by the way;
She hath life's empty garment at command,
But her own death lies covert in the prey;
As if a thief should steal a tainted vest,
Some dead man's spoil, and sicken of his pest.

LI.

Now she compels him to her deeps below,
Hiding his face beneath her plenteous hair,
Which jealously she shakes all round her brow,
For dread of envy, though no eyes are there
But seals', and all brute tenants of the deep,
Which heedless through the wave their journeys keep.

LII.

Down and still downward through the dusky green
She bore him, murmuring with joyous haste
In too rash ignorance, as he had been
Born to the texture of that watery waste;
That which she breath'd and sigh'd, the emerald wave,
How could her pleasant home become his grave!

LIII.

Down and still downward through the dusky green
She bore her treasure, with a face too nigh
To mark how life was alter'd in its mien,
Or how the light grew torpid in his eye,
Or how his pearly breath unprison'd there,
Flew up to join the universal air.

LIV.

She could not miss the throbbings of his heart,
Whilst her own pulse so wanton'd in its joy;
She could not guess he struggled to depart,
And when he strove no more, the hapless boy!
She read his mortal stillness for content,
Feeling no fear where only love was meant.

LV.

Soon she alights upon her ocean-floor,
And straight unyokes her arms from her fair prize;
Then on his lovely face begins to pore,
As if to glut her soul; — her hungry eyes
Have grown so jealous of her arms' delight;
It seems, she hath no other sense but sight.

LVI.

But O sad marvel! O most bitter strange!
What dismal magic makes his cheek so pale,
Why will he not embrace, — why not exchange
Her kindly kisses; — wherefore not exhale
Some odorous message from life's ruby gates,
Where she his first sweet embassy awaits?

LVII.

Her eyes, poor watchers, fix'd upon his looks,
Are grappled with a wonder near to grief,
As one, who pores on undecypher'd books,
Strains vain surmise, and dodges with belief;
So she keeps gazing with a mazy thought,
Framing a thousand doubts that end in nought.

LVIII.

Too stern inscription for a page so young,
The dark translation of his look was death!
But death was written in an alien tongue,
And learning was not by to give it breath;
So one deep woe sleeps buried in its seal,
Which Time, untimely, hasteth to reveal.

LIX.

Meanwhile she sits unconscious of her hap,
Nursing Death's marble effigy, which there
With heavy head lies pillow'd in her lap,
And elbows all unhinged; — his sleeking hair
Creeps o'er her knees, and settles where his hand
Leans with lax fingers crook'd against the sand;

LX.

And there lies spread in many an oozy trail,
Like glossy weeds hung from a chalky base,
That shows no whiter than his brow is pale;
So soon the wintry death had bleach'd his face
Into cold marble, — with blue chilly shades,
Showing wherein the freezy blood pervades.

LXI.

And o'er his steadfast cheek a furrow'd pain
Hath set, and stiffen'd like a storm in ice,
Showing by drooping lines the deadly strain
Of mortal anguish; — yet you might gaze twice
Ere Death it seem'd, and not his cousin, Sleep,
That through those creviced lids did underpeep.

LXII.

But all that tender bloom about his eyes,
Is death's own vi'lets, which his utmost rite
It is to scatter when the red rose dies;
For blue is chilly, and akin to white:
Also he leaves some tinges on his lips,
Which he hath kiss'd with such cold frosty nips.

LXIII.

" Surely," quoth she, " he sleeps, the senseless thing,
Oppress'd and faint with toiling in the stream !"
Therefore she will not mar his rest, but sing
So low, her tune shall mingle with his dream ;
Meanwhile, her lily fingers tasks to twine
His uncrispt locks uncurling in the brine.

LXIV.

" O lovely boy !" — thus she attun'd her voice, —
" Welcome, thrice welcome, to a sea-maid's home,
My love-mate thou shalt be, and true heart's choice ;
How have I long'd such a twin-self should come, —
A lonely thing, till this sweet chance befel,
My heart kept sighing like a hollow shell.

LXV.

" Here thou shalt live, beneath this secret dome,
An ocean bow'r, defended by the shade
Of quiet waters ; a cool emerald gloom
To lap thee all about. Nay, be not fray'd,
Those are but shady fishes that sail by
Like antic clouds across my liquid sky !

LXVI.

" Look how the sunbeam burns upon their scales,
And shows rich glimpses of their Tyrian skins,
They flash small lightnings from their vigorous tails,
And winking stars are kindled at their fins;
These shall divert thee in thy weariest mood,
And seek thy hand for gamesomeness and food.

LXVII.

" Lo! those green pretty leaves with tassel bells,
My flowrets those, that never pine for drowth;
Myself did plant them in the dappled shells,
That drink the wave with such a rosy mouth, —
Pearls wouldst thou have beside? crystals to shine?
I had such treasures once, — now they are thine.

LXVIII.

" Now, lay thine ear against this golden sand,
And thou shalt hear the music of the sea;
Those hollow tunes it plays against the land, —
Is't not a rich and wondrous melody?
I have lain hours, and fancied in its tone
I heard the languages of ages gone!

LXIX.

" I too can sing when it shall please thy choice,
And breathe soft tunes through a melodious shell,
Though heretofore I have but set my voice
To some long sighs, grief harmonized, to tell
How desolate I fared; — but this sweet change
Will add new notes of gladness to my range!

LXX.

" Or bid me speak and I will tell thee tales,
Which I have framed out of the noise of waves;
Ere now, I have commun'd with senseless gales,
And held vain colloquies with barren caves;
But I could talk to thee whole days and days,
Only to word my love a thousand ways.

LXXI.

" But if thy lips will bless me with their speech,
Then ope, sweet oracles! and I'll be mute;
I was born ignorant for thee to teach,
Nay all love's lore to thy dear looks impute;
Then ope thine eyes, fair teachers, by whose light
I saw to give away my heart aright!"

LXXII.

But cold and deaf the sullen creature lies,
Over her knees, and with concealing clay,
Like hoarding Avarice locks up his eyes,
And leaves her world impoverish'd of day;
Then at his cruel lips she bends to plead,
But there the door is closed against her need.

LXXIII.

Surely he sleeps, — so her false wits infer!
Alas! poor sluggard, ne'er to wake again!
Surely he sleeps, yet without any stir
That might denote a vision in his brain;
Or if he does not sleep, he feigns too long,
Twice she hath reach'd the ending of her song.

LXXIV.

Therefore 'tis time she tells him to uncover
Those radiant jesters, and disperse her fears,
Whereby her April face is shaded over,
Like rainy clouds just ripe for showering tears;
Nay, if he will not wake, so poor she gets,
Herself must rob those lock'd up cabinets.

LXXV.

With that she stoops above his brow, and bids
Her busy hands forsake his tangled hair,
And tenderly lift up those coffer-lids,
That she may gaze upon the jewels there,
Like babes that pluck an early bud apart,
To know the dainty colour of its heart.

LXXVI.

Now, picture one, soft creeping to a bed,
Who slowly parts the fringe-hung canopies,
And then starts back to find the sleeper dead;
So she looks in on his uncover'd eyes,
And seeing all within so drear and dark,
Her own bright soul dies in her like a spark.

LXXVII.

Backward she falls, like a pale prophetess,
Under the swoon of holy divination:
And what had all surpass'd her simple guess,
She now resolves in this dark revelation;
Death's very mystery, — oblivious death; —
Long sleep, — deep night, and an entranced breath.

LXXVIII.

Yet life, though wounded sore, not wholly slain,
Merely obscur'd, and not extinguish'd, lies;
Her breath that stood at ebb, soon flows again,
Heaving her hollow breast with heavy sighs,
And light comes in and kindles up the gloom,
To light her spirit from its transient tomb.

LXXIX.

Then like the sun, awaken'd at new dawn,
With pale bewilder'd face she peers about,
And spies blurr'd images obscurely drawn,
Uncertain shadows in a haze of doubt;
But her true grief grows shapely by degrees,
A perish'd creature lying on her knees.

LXXX.

And now she knows how that old Murther preys,
Whose quarry on her lap lies newly slain;
How he roams all abroad and grimly slays,
Like a lean tiger in Love's own domain;
Parting fond mates, — and oft in flowery lawns
Bereaves mild mothers of their milky fawns.

LXXXI.

O too dear knowledge! O pernicious earning!
Foul curse engraven upon beauty's page!
Ev'n now the sorrow of that deadly learning
Ploughs up her brow, like an untimely age,
And on her cheek stamps verdict of death's truth,
By canker blights upon the bud of youth!

LXXXII.

For as unwholesome winds decay the leaf,
So her cheeks' rose is perish'd by her sighs,
And withers in the sickly breath of grief;
Whilst unacquainted rheum bedims her eyes,
Tears, virgin tears, the first that ever leapt
From those young lids, now plentifully wept.

LXXXIII.

Whence being shed, the liquid crystalline
Drops straightway down, refusing to partake
In gross admixture with the baser brine,
But shrinks and hardens into pearls opaque,
Hereafter to be worn on arms and ears;
So one maid's trophy is another's tears!

LXXXIV.

" O foul Arch-Shadow, thou old cloud of Night,
(Thus in her frenzy she began to wail,)
Thou blank oblivion — blotter out of light,
Life's ruthless murderer, and dear love's bale!
Why hast thou left thy havoc incomplete,
Leaving me here, and slaying the more sweet?

LXXXV.

" Lo! what a lovely ruin thou hast made,
Alas! alas! thou hast no eyes to see,
And blindly slew'st him in misguided shade.
Would I had lent my doting sense to thee!
But now I turn to thee, a willing mark,
Thine arrows miss me in the aimless dark!

LXXXVI.

" O doubly cruel! — twice misdoing spite,
But I will guide thee with my helping eyes,
Or walk the wide world through, devoid of sight,
Yet thou shalt know me by my many sighs.
Nay, then thou should'st have spared my rose, false Death,
And known Love's flow'r by smelling his sweet breath;

LXXXVII.

" Or, when thy furious rage was round him dealing,
Love should have grown from touching of his skin,
But like cold marble thou art all unfeeling,
And hast no ruddy springs of warmth within,
And being but a shape of freezing bone,
Thy touching only turn'd my love to stone!

LXXXVIII.

" And here, alas! he lies across my knees,
With cheeks still colder than the stilly wave,
The light beneath his eyelids seems to freeze,
Here then, since Love is dead and lacks a grave,
O come and dig it in my sad heart's core —
That wound will bring a balsam for its sore!

LXXXIX.

" For art thou not a sleep where sense of ill,
Lies stingless, like a sense benumb'd with cold,
Healing all hurts only with sleep's good will,
So shall I slumber, and perchance behold
My living love in dreams, — O happy night,
That lets me company his banish'd spright!

XC.

" O poppy Death ! — sweet poisoner of sleep !
Where shall I seek for thee, oblivious drug,
That I may steep thee in my drink, and creep
Out of life's coil. Look, Idol ! how I hug
Thy dainty image in this strict embrace,
And kiss this clay-cold model of thy face !

XCI.

" Put out, put out these sun-consuming lamps,
I do but read my sorrows by their shine,
O come and quench them with thy oozy damps,
And let my darkness intermix with thine ;
Since love is blinded, wherefore should I see,
Now love is death, — death will be love to me !

XCII.

" Away, away, this vain complaining breath,
It does but stir the troubles that I weep,
Let it be hush'd and quieted, sweet Death,
The wind must settle ere the wave can sleep, —
Since love is silent, I would fain be mute,
O Death, be gracious to my dying suit !"

XCIII.

Thus far she pleads, but pleading nought avails her,
For Death, her sullen burthen, deigns no heed,
Then with dumb craving arms, since darkness fails her,
She prays to heav'n's fair light, as if her need
Inspir'd her there were Gods to pity pain,
Or end it, — but she lifts her arms in vain!

XCIV.

Poor gilded Grief! the subtle light by this
With mazy gold creeps through her watery mine,
And, diving downward through the green abyss,
Lights up her palace with an amber shine;
There, falling on her arms, — the crystal skin
Reveals the ruby tide that fares within.

XCV.

Look how the fulsome beam would hang a glory
On her dark hair, but the dark hairs repel it;
Look how the perjur'd glow suborns a story
On her pale lips, but lips refuse to tell it;
Grief will not swerve from grief, however told
On coral lips, or character'd in gold;

XCVI.

Or else, thou maid! safe anchor'd on Love's neck,
Listing the hapless doom of young Leander,
Thou would'st not shed a tear for that old wreck,
Sitting secure where no wild surges wander;
Whereas the woe moves on with tragic pace,
And shows its sad reflection in thy face.

XCVII.

Thus having travell'd on, and track'd the tale,
Like the due course of an old bas-relief,
Where Tragedy pursues her progress pale,
Brood here awhile upon that sea-maid's grief,
And take a deeper imprint from the frieze
Of that young Fate, with Death upon her knees.

XCVIII.

Then whilst the melancholy muse withal
Resumes her music in a sadder tone,
Meanwhile, the sunbeam strikes upon the wall,
Conceive that lovely siren to live on,
Ev'n as Hope whisper'd, the Promethean light
Would kindle up the dead Leander's spright.

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XCIX.

" 'Tis light," she says, " that feeds the glittering stars,
And those were stars set in his heavenly brow,
But this salt cloud, this cold sea-vapour, mars
Their radiant breathing, and obscures them now,
Therefore I'll lay him in the clear blue air,
And see how these dull orbs will kindle there."

C.

Swiftly as dolphins glide, or swifter yet,
With dead Leander in her fond arms' fold,
She cleaves the meshes of that radiant net,
The sun hath twin'd above of liquid gold,
Nor slacks, till on the margin of the land,
She lays his body on the glowing sand.

CI.

There, like a pearly waif, just past the reach
Of foamy billows he lies cast. Just then,
Some listless fishers, straying down the beach,
Spy out this wonder. Thence the curious men,
Low crouching, creep into a thicket brake,
And watch her doings till their rude hearts ache.

CII.

First she begins to chafe him till she faints,
Then falls upon his mouth with kisses many,
And sometimes pauses in her own complaints
To list his breathing, but there is not any, —
Then looks into his eyes where no light dwells,
Light makes no pictures in such muddy wells.

CIII.

The hot sun parches his discover'd eyes,
The hot sun beats on his discolour'd limbs,
The sand is oozy whereupon he lies,
Soiling his fairness; — then away she swims,
Meaning to gather him a daintier bed,
Plucking the cool fresh weeds, brown, green, and red.

CIV.

But, simple-witted thief, while she dives under,
Another robs her of her amorous theft;
The ambush'd fishermen creep forth to plunder,
And steal the unwatch'd treasure she has left;
Only his void impression dints the sands;
Leander is purloin'd by stealthy hands!

CV.

Lo! how she shudders off the beaded wave!
Like Grief all over tears, and senseless falls,
His void imprint seems hollow'd for her grave,
Then, rising on her knees, looks round and calls
On Hero! Hero! having learn'd this name
Of his last breath, she calls him by the same.

CVI.

Then with her frantic hands she rends her hairs,
And casts them forth, sad keepsakes to the wind,
As if in plucking those she pluck'd her cares;
But grief lies deeper, and remains behind
Like a barb'd arrow, rankling in her brain,
Turning her very thoughts to throbs of pain.

CVII.

Anon her tangled locks are left alone,
And down upon the sand she meekly sits,
Hard by the foam as humble as a stone,
Like an enchanted maid beside her wits,
That ponders with a look serene and tragic,
Stunn'd by the mighty mystery of magic.

CVIII.

Or think of Ariadne's utter trance,
Craz'd by the flight of that disloyal traitor,
Who left her gazing on the green expanse
That swallow'd up his track, — yet this would mate her,
Ev'n in the cloudy summit of her woe,
When o'er the far sea-brim she saw him go.

CIX.

For even so she bows, and bends her gaze
O'er the eternal waste, as if to sum
Its waves by weary thousands all her days,
Dismally doom'd! meanwhile the billows come,
And coldly dabble with her quiet feet,
Like any bleaching stones they wont to greet.

CX.

And thence into her lap have boldly sprung,
Washing her weedy tresses to and fro,
That round her crouching knees have darkly hung,
But she sits careless of waves' ebb and flow,
Like a lone beacon on a desert coast,
Showing where all her hope was wreck'd and lost.

CXI.

Yet whether in the sea or vaulted sky,
She knoweth not her love's abrupt resort,
So like a shape of dreams he left her eye,
Winking with doubt. Meanwhile, the churl's report
Has throng'd the beach with many a curious face,
That peeps upon her from its hiding place.

CXII.

And here a head, and there a brow half seen,
Dodges behind a rock. Here on his hands,
A mariner his crumpled cheeks doth lean
Over a rugged crest. Another stands,
Holding his harmful arrow at the head,
Still check'd by human caution and strange dread.

CXIII.

One stops his ears, — another close beholder
Whispers unto the next his grave surmise;
This crouches down, — and just above his shoulder,
A woman's pity saddens in her eyes,
And prompts her to befriend that lonely grief,
With all sweet helps of sisterly relief.

CXIV.

And down the sunny beach she paces slowly,
With many doubtful pauses by the way;
Grief hath an influence so hush'd and holy, —
Making her twice attempt, ere she can lay
Her hand upon that sea-maid's shoulder white,
Which makes her startle up in wild affright.

CXV.

And, like a seal, she leaps into the wave
That drowns the shrill remainder of her scream;
Anon the sea fills up the watery cave,
And seals her exit with a foamy seam, —
Leaving those baffled gazers on the beach,
Turning in uncouth wonder each to each.

CXVI.

Some watch, some call, some see her head emerge,
Wherever a brown weed falls through the foam;
Some point to white eruptions of the surge: —
But she is vanish'd to her shady home,
Under the deep, inscrutable, — and there
Weeps in a midnight made of her own hair.

CXVII.

Now here, the sighing winds, before unheard,
Forth from their cloudy caves begin to blow,
Till all the surface of the deep is stirr'd,
Like to the panting grief it hides below;
And heav'n is cover'd with a stormy rack,
Soiling the waters with its inky black.

CXVIII.

The screaming fowl resigns her finny prey,
And labours shoreward with a bending wing,
Rowing against the wind her toilsome way;
Meanwhile, the curling billows chafe, and fling
Their dewy frost still further on the stones,
That answer to the wind with hollow groans.

CXIX.

And here and there a fisher's far-off bark
Flies with the sun's last glimpse upon its sail,
Like a bright flame amid the waters dark,
Watch'd with the hope and fear of maidens pale;
And anxious mothers that upturn their brows,
Freighting the gusty wind with frequent vows,

CXX.

For that the horrid deep has no sure track
To guide love safe into his homely haven.
And lo! the storm grows blacker in its wrath,
O'er the dark billow brooding like a raven,
That bodes of death and widow's sorrowing,
Under the dusky covert of his wing.

CXXI.

And so day ended. But no vesper spark
Hung forth its heavenly sign; but sheets of flame
Play'd round the savage features of the dark,
Making night horrible. That night, there came
A weeping maiden to high Sestos' steep,
And tore her hair and gaz'd upon the deep.

CXXII.

And wav'd aloft her bright and ruddy torch,
Whose flame the boastful wind so rudely fann'd,
That oft it would recoil, and basely scorch
The tender covert of her sheltering hand;
Which yet, for love's dear sake, disdain'd retire,
And, like a glorying martyr, brav'd the fire.

CXXIII.

For that was love's own sign and beacon guide
Across the Hellespont's wide weary space,
Wherein he nightly struggled with the tide;
Look what a red it forges on her face,
As if she blush'd at holding such a light,
Ev'n in the unseen presence of the night!

CXXIV.

Whereas her tragic cheek is truly pale,
And colder than the rude and ruffian air
That howls into her ear a horrid tale
Of storm, and wreck, and uttermost despair,
Saying, " Leander floats amid the surge,
And those are dismal waves that sing his dirge."

CXXV.

And hark! — a grieving voice, trembling and faint,
Blends with the hollow sobbings of the sea;
Like the sad music of a siren's plaint,
But shriller than Leander's voice should be,
Unless the wintry death had changed its tone, —
Wherefore she thinks she hears his spirit moan.

CXXVI.

For now, upon each brief and breathless pause,
Made by the raging winds, it plainly calls,
On Hero! Hero! — whereupon she draws
Close to the dizzy brink, that ne'er appals
Her brave and constant spirit to recoil,
However the wild billows toss and toil.

CXXVII.

" Oh! dost thou live under the deep deep sea?
I thought such love as thine could never die;
If thou hast gain'd an immortality,
From the kind pitying sea-god, so will I;
And this false cruel tide that used to sever
Our hearts, shall be our common home for ever!

CXXVIII.

" There we will sit and sport upon one pillow,
And sing our ocean ditties all the day,
And lie together on the same green pillow,
That curls above us with its dewy spray;
And ever in one presence live and dwell,
Like two twin pearls within the selfsame shell.

CXXIX.

One moment then, upon the dizzy verge
She stands; — with face upturn'd against the sky;
A moment more, upon the foamy surge
She gazes, with a calm despairing eye;
Feeling that awful pause of blood and breath
Which life endures when it confronts with death; —

CXXX.

Then from the giddy steep she madly springs,
Grasping her maiden robes, that vainly kept
Panting abroad, like unavailing wings,
To save her from her death. — The sea-maid wept,
And in a crystal cave her corse enshrin'd,
No meaner sepulchre should Hero find!

LYCUS, THE CENTAUR.

TO

J. H. REYNOLDS, Esq.

My dear Reynolds,

You will remember "Lycus." — It was written in the pleasant spring-time of our friendship, and I am glad to maintain that association, by connecting your name with the Poem. It will gratify me to find that you regard it with the old partiality for the writings of each other, which prevailed in those days. For my own sake, I must regret that your pen goes now into far other records than those which used to delight me.

Your true Friend and Brother,

T. HOOD.

LYCUS, THE CENTAUR.

FROM AN UNROLLED MANUSCRIPT OF APOLLONIUS CURIUS.

THE ARGUMENT.

Lycus, detained by Circe in her magical dominion, is beloved by a Water Nymph, who desiring to render him immortal, has recourse to the Sorceress. Circe gives her an incantation to pronounce, which should turn Lycus into a horse; but the horrible effect of the charm causing her to break off in the midst, he becomes a Centaur.

Who hath ever been lured and bound by a spell
To wander, fore-doom'd, in that circle of hell
Where Witchery works with her will like a god,
Works more than the wonders of time at a nod, —
At a word, — at a touch, — at a flash of the eye,
But each form is a cheat, and each sound is a lie,
Things born of a wish — to endure for a thought,
Or last for long ages — to vanish to nought,

Or put on new semblance? O Jove, I had given
The throne of a kingdom to know if that heaven,
And the earth and its streams were of Circé, or whether
They kept the world's birth-day and brighten'd together!
For I lov'd them in terror, and constantly dreaded
That the earth where I trod, and the cave where I bedded,
The face I might dote on, should live out the lease
Of the charm that created, and suddenly cease:
And I gave me to slumber, as if from one dream
To another — each horrid — and drank of the stream
Like a first taste of blood, lest as water I quaff'd
Swift poison, and never should breathe from the draught, —
Such drink as her own monarch husband drain'd up
When he pledg'd her, and Fate clos'd his eyes in the cup.
And I pluck'd of the fruit with held breath, and a fear
That the branch would start back and scream out in my ear;
For once, at my suppering, I pluck'd in the dusk
An apple, juice-gushing and fragrant of musk;

But by daylight my fingers were crimson'd with gore,
And the half-eaten fragment was flesh at the core;
And once — only once — for the love of its blush,
I broke a bloom bough, but there came such a gush
On my hand, that it fainted away in weak fright,
While the leaf-hidden woodpecker shriek'd at the sight;
And oh! such an agony thrill'd in that note,
That my soul, startling up, beat its wings in my throat,
As it long'd to be free of a body whose hand
Was doom'd to work torments a Fury had plann'd!

There I stood without stir, yet how willing to flee,
As if rooted and horror-turn'd into a tree, —
Oh! for innocent death, — and to suddenly win it,
I drank of the stream, but no poison was in it;
I plung'd in its waters, but ere I could sink,
Some invisible fate pull'd me back to the brink;
I sprang from the rock, from its pinnacle height,
But fell on the grass with a grasshopper's flight;
I ran at my fears — they were fears and no more,
For the bear would not mangle my limbs, nor the boar,

But moan'd, — all their brutaliz'd flesh could not smother
The horrible truth, — we were kin to each other!

They were mournfully gentle, and group'd for relief,
All foes in their skin, but all friends in their grief:
The leopard was there, — baby-mild in its feature;
And the tiger, black barr'd, with the gaze of a creature
That knew gentle pity; the bristle-back'd boar,
His innocent tusks stain'd with mulberry gore;
And the laughing hyena — but laughing no more;
And the snake, not with magical orbs to devise
Strange death, but with woman's attraction of eyes;
The tall ugly ape, that still bore a dim shine
Through his hairy eclipse of a manhood divine;
And the elephant stately, with more than its reason,
How thoughtful in sadness! but this is no season
To reckon them up from the lag-bellied toad
To the mammoth, whose sobs shook his ponderous load.
There were woes of all shapes, wretched forms, when I came,
That hung down their heads with a human-like shame;
The elephant hid in the boughs, and the bear
Shed over his eyes the dark veil of his hair;

And the womanly soul turning sick with disgust,
Tried to vomit herself from her serpentine crust;
While all groan'd their groans into one at their lot,
As I brought them the image of what they were not.

Then rose a wild sound of the human voice choking
Through vile brutal organs — low tremulous croaking;
Cries swallow'd abruptly — deep animal tones
Attun'd to strange passion, and full-utter'd groans;
All shuddering weaker, till hush'd in a pause
Of tongues in mute motion and wide-yearning jaws;
And I guess'd that those horrors were meant to tell o'er
The tale of their woes; but the silence told more
That writhed on their tongues; and I knelt on the sod,
And pray'd with my voice to the cloud-stirring God,
For the sad congregation of supplicants there,
That upturn'd to his heaven brute faces of prayer;
And I ceased, and they utter'd a moaning so deep,
That I wept for my heart-ease, — but they could not weep,
And gazed with red eye-balls, all wistfully dry,
At the comfort of tears in a stag's human eye.

Then I motion'd them round, and, to soothe their distress,
I caress'd, and they bent them to meet my caress,
Their necks to my arm, and their heads to my palm,
And with poor grateful eyes suffer'd meekly and calm
Those tokens of kindness, withheld by hard fate
From returns that might chill the warm pity to hate;
So they passively bow'd — save the serpent, that leapt
To my breast like a sister, and pressingly crept
In embrace of my neck, and with close kisses blister'd
My lips in rash love, — then drew backward, and glister'd
Her eyes in my face, and loud hissing affright,
Dropt down, and swift started away from my sight!

This sorrow was theirs, but thrice wretched my lot,
Turn'd brute in my soul, though my body was not
When I fled from the sorrow of womanly faces,
That shrouded their woe in the shade of lone places,
And dash'd off bright tears, till their fingers were wet,
And then wiped their lids with long tresses of jet:
But I fled — though they stretch'd out their hands, all entangled
With hair, and blood-stain'd of the breasts they had mangled, —

Though they call'd — and perchance but to ask, had I seen
Their loves, or to tell the vile wrongs that had been:
But I stay'd not to hear, lest the story should hold
Some hell-form of words, some enchantment once told,
Might translate me in flesh to a brute; and I dreaded
To gaze on their charms, lest my faith should be wedded
With some pity, — and love in that pity perchance —
To a thing not all lovely; for once at a glance
Methought, where one sat, I descried a bright wonder
That flow'd like a long silver rivulet under
The long fenny grass, with so lovely a breast,
Could it be a snake-tail made the charm of the rest?

So I roam'd in that circle of horrors, and Fear
Walk'd with me, by hills, and in valleys, and near
Cluster'd trees for their gloom — not to shelter from heat —
But lest a brute-shadow should grow at my feet;
And besides that full oft in the sunshiny place,
Dark shadows would gather like clouds on its face,
In the horrible likeness of demons, (that none
Could see, like invisible flames in the sun;)

But grew to one monster that seized on the light,
Like the dragon that strangles the moon in the night;
Fierce sphinxes, long serpents, and asps of the South;
Wild birds of huge beak, and all horrors that drouth
Engenders of slime in the land of the pest,
Vile shapes without shape, and foul bats of the West,
Bringing Night on their wings; and the bodies wherein
Great Brahma imprisons the spirits of sin,
Many-handed, that blent in one phantom of fight
Like a Titan, and threatfully warr'd with the light;
I have heard the wild shriek that gave signal to close,
When they rush'd on that shadowy Python of foes,
That met with sharp beaks and wide gaping of jaws,
With flappings of wings, and fierce grasping of claws,
And whirls of long tails: — I have seen the quick flutter
Of fragments dissever'd, — and necks stretch'd to utter
Long screamings of pain, — the swift motion of blows,
And wrestling of arms — to the flight at the close,
When the dust of the earth startled upward in rings,
And flew on the whirlwind that follow'd their wings.

Thus they fled — not forgotten — but often to grow
Like fears in my eyes, when I walk'd to and fro

In the shadows, and felt from some beings unseen
The warm touch of kisses, but clean or unclean
I knew not, nor whether the love I had won
Was of heaven or hell — till one day in the sun,
In its very noon-blaze, I could fancy a thing
Of beauty, but faint as the cloud-mirrors fling
On the gaze of the shepherd that watches the sky,
Half-seen and half-dream'd in the soul of his eye.
And when in my musings I gaz'd on the stream,
In motionless trances of thought, there would seem
A face like that face, looking upward through mine;
With its eyes full of love, and the dim-drowned shine
Of limbs and fair garments, like clouds in that blue
Serene: — there I stood for long hours but to view
Those fond earnest eyes that were ever uplifted
Towards me, and wink'd as the water-weed drifted
Between; but the fish knew that presence, and plied
Their long curvy tails, and swift darted aside.

There I gazed for lost time, and forgot all the things
That once had been wonders — the fishes with wings,
And the glimmer of magnified eyes that look'd up
From the glooms of the bottom like pearls in a cup,

And the huge endless serpent of silvery gleam,
Slow winding along like a tide in the stream.
Some maid of the waters, some Naiad, methought
Held me dear in the pearl of her eye — and I brought
My wish to that fancy; and often I dash'd
My limbs in the water, and suddenly splash'd
The cool drops around me, yet clung to the brink,
Chill'd by watery fears, how that Beauty might sink
With my life in her arms to her garden, and bind me
With its long tangled grasses, or cruelly wind me
In some eddy to hum out my life in her ear,
Like a spider-caught bee, — and in aid of that fear
Came the tardy remembrance — Oh falsest of men!
Why was not that beauty remember'd till then?
My love, my safe love, whose glad life would have run
Into mine — like a drop — that our fate might be one,
That now, even now, — may-be, — clasp'd in a dream,
That form which I gave to some jilt of the stream,
And gaz'd with fond eyes that her tears tried to smother
On a mock of those eyes that I gave to another!

Then I rose from the stream, but the eyes of my mind,
Still full of the tempter, kept gazing behind

On her crystalline face, while I painfully leapt
To the bank, and shook off the curst waters, and wept
With my brow in the reeds; and the reeds to my ear
Bow'd, bent by no wind, and in whispers of fear,
Growing small with large secrets, foretold me of one
That loved me, — but oh to fly from her, and shun
Her love like a pest — though her love was as true
To mine as her stream to the heavenly blue;
For why should I love her with love that would bring
All misfortune, like Hate, on so joyous a thing?
Because of her rival, — even Her whose witch-face
I had slighted, and therefore was doom'd in that place
To roam, and had roam'd, where all horrors grew rank,
Nine days ere I wept with my brow on that bank;
Her name be not named, but her spite would not fail
To our love like a blight; and they told me the tale
Of Scylla, and Picus, imprison'd to speak
His shrill-screaming woe through a woodpecker's beak.

Then they ceased — I had heard as the voice of my star
That told me the truth of my fortunes — thus far
I had read of my sorrow, and lay in the hush
Of deep meditation, — when lo! a light crush

Of the reeds, and I turn'd and look'd round in the night
Of new sunshine, and saw, as I sipp'd of the light
Narrow-winking, the realized nymph of the stream,
Rising up from the wave with the bend and the gleam
Of a fountain, and o'er her white arms she kept throwing
Bright torrents of hair, that went flowing and flowing
In falls to her feet, and the blue waters roll'd
Down her limbs like a garment, in many a fold,
Sun-spangled, gold-broider'd, and fled far behind,
Like an infinite train. So she came and reclin'd
In the reeds, and I hunger'd to see her unseal
The buds of her eyes that would ope and reveal
The blue that was in them; and they ope'd, and she rais'd
Two orbs of pure crystal, and timidly gazed
With her eyes on my eyes; but their colour and shine
Was of that which they look'd on, and mostly of mine —
For she loved me, — except when she blush'd, and they sank,
Shame-humbled, to number the stones on the bank,
Or her play-idle fingers, while lisping she told me
How she put on her veil, and in love to behold me,

Would wing through the sun till she fainted away
Like a mist, and then flew to her waters and lay
In love-patience long hours, and sore dazzled her eyes
In watching for mine 'gainst the midsummer skies.
But now they were heal'd,—O my heart, it still dances
When I think of the charm of her changeable glances,
And my image how small when it sank in the deep
Of her eyes where her soul was,—Alas! now they weep,
And none knoweth where. In what stream do her eyes
Shed invisible tears? Who beholds where her sighs
Flow in eddies, or sees the ascent of the leaf
She has pluck'd with her tresses? Who listens her grief
Like a far fall of waters, or hears where her feet
Grow emphatic among the loose pebbles, and beat
Them together? Ah! surely her flowers float adown
To the sea unaccepted, and little ones drown
For need of her mercy,—even he whose twin-brother
Will miss him for ever; and the sorrowful mother
Imploreth in vain for his body to kiss
And cling to, all dripping and cold as it is,
Because that soft pity is lost in hard pain!
We loved,—how we loved!—for I thought not again

Of the woes that were whisper'd like fears in that place
If I gave me to beauty. Her face was the face
Far away, and her eyes were the eyes that were drown'd
For my absence, — her arms were the arms that sought round,
And clasp'd me to nought; for I gazed and became
Only true to my falsehood, and had but one name
For two loves, and call'd ever on Ægle, sweet maid
Of the sky-loving waters, — and was not afraid
Of the sight of her skin; — for it never could be,
Her beauty and love were misfortunes to me!

Thus our bliss had endured for a time-shorten'd space,
Like a day made of three, and the smile of her face
Had been with me for joy, — when she told me indeed
Her love was self-task'd with a work that would need
Some short hours, for in truth 'twas the veriest pity
Our love should not last, and then sang me a ditty,
Of one with warm lips that should love her, and love her
When suns were burnt dim and long ages past over.
So she fled with her voice, and I patiently nested
My limbs in the reeds, in still quiet, and rested

Till my thoughts grew extinct, and I sank in a sleep
Of dreams, — but their meaning was hidden too deep
To be read what their woe was; — but still it was woe
That was writ on all faces that swam to and fro
In that river of night; — and the gaze of their eyes
Was sad, — and the bend of their brows, — and their cries
Were seen, but I heard not. The warm touch of tears
Travell'd down my cold cheeks, and I shook till my fears
Awaked me, and lo! I was couch'd in a bower,
The growth of long summers rear'd up in an hour!
Then I said, in the fear of my dream, I will fly
From this magic, but could not, because that my eye
Grew love-idle among the rich blooms; and the earth
Held me down with its coolness of touch, and the mirth
Of some bird was above me, — who, even in fear,
Would startle the thrush? and methought there drew near
A form as of Ægle, — but it was not the face
Hope made, and I knew the witch-Queen of that place,
Even Circe the Cruel, that came like a Death
Which I fear'd, and yet fled not, for want of my breath.
There was thought in her face, and her eyes were not raised
From the grass at her foot, but I saw, as I gazed,

Her spite — and her countenance changed with her
mind
As she plann'd how to thrall me with beauty, and bind
My soul to her charms, — and her long tresses play'd
From shade into shine and from shine into shade,
Like a day in mid-autumn, — first fair, O how fair!
With long snaky locks of the adderblack hair
That clung round her neck, — those dark locks that I
prize,
For the sake of a maid that once loved me with eyes
Of that fathomless hue, — but they changed as they
roll'd,
And brighten'd, and suddenly blazed into gold
That she comb'd into flames, and the locks that fell down
Turn'd dark as they fell, but I slighted their brown,
Nor loved, till I saw the light ringlets shed wild,
That innocence wears when she is but a child;
And her eyes, — O I ne'er had been witch'd with their
shine,
Had they been any other, my Ægle, than thine!

Then I gave me to magic, and gazed till I madden'd
In the full of their light, — but I sadden'd and sadden'd

The deeper I look'd, — till I sank on the snow
Of her bosom, a thing made of terror and woe,
And answer'd its throb with the shudder of fears,
And hid my cold eyes from her eyes with my tears,
And strain'd her white arms with the still languid weight
Of a fainting distress. There she sat like the Fate
That is nurse unto Death, and bent over in shame
To hide me from her — the true Ægle — that came
With the words on her lips the false witch had foregiv'n
To make me immortal — for now I was even
At the portals of Death, who but waited the hush
Of world-sounds in my ear to cry welcome, and rush
With my soul to the banks of his black-flowing river.
O would it had flown from my body for ever,
Ere I listen'd those words, when I felt with a start,
The life blood rush back in one throb to my heart,
And saw the pale lips where the rest of that spell
Had perish'd in horror — and heard the farewell
Of that voice that was drown'd in the dash of the stream!
How fain had I follow'd, and plunged with that scream
Into death, but my being indignantly lagg'd
Through the brutaliz'd flesh that I painfully dragg'd

Behind me: — " O Circe! O mother of Spite!
Speak the last of that curse! and imprison me quite
In the husk of a brute, — that no pity may name
The man that I was, — that no kindred may claim
The monster I am! Let me utterly be
Brute-buried, and Nature's dishonour with me
Uninscribed!" —But she listen'd my prayer, that was
praise
To her malice, with smiles, and advised me to gaze
On the river for love, — and perchance she would make
In pity a maid without eyes for my sake,
And she left me like Scorn. Then I ask'd of the wave,
What monster I was, and it trembled and gave
The true shape of my grief, and I turn'd with my face
From all waters for ever, and fled through that place,
Till with horror more strong than all magic I pass'd
Its bounds, and the world was before me at last.

There I wander'd in sorrow, and shunn'd the abodes
Of men, that stood up in the likeness of Gods,
But I saw from afar the warm shine of the sun
On their cities, where man was a million, not one;

And I saw the white smoke of their altars ascending,
That show'd where the hearts of the many were blending,
And the wind in my face brought shrill voices that came
From the trumpets that gather'd whole bands in one fame
As a chorus of man, — and they stream'd from the gates
Like a dusky libation pour'd out to the Fates.
But at times there were gentler processions of peace
That I watch'd with my soul in my eyes till their cease,
There were women ! there men ! but to me a third sex
I saw them all dots — yet I loved them as specks:
And oft to assuage a sad yearning of eyes
I stole near the city, but stole covert-wise
Like a wild beast of love, and perchance to be smitten
By some hand that I rather had wept on than bitten !
Oh, I once had a haunt near a cot where a mother
Daily sat in the shade with her child, and would smother
Its eyelids in kisses, and then in its sleep
Sang dreams in its ear of its manhood, while deep
In a thicket of willows I gazed o'er the brooks
That murmur'd between us and kiss'd them with looks;

But the willows unbosom'd their secret, and never
I return'd to a spot I had startled for ever,
Though I oft long'd to know, but could ask it of none,
Was the mother still fair, and how big was her son?

For the haunters of fields they all shunn'd me by flight,
The men in their horror, the women in fright;
None ever remain'd save a child once that sported
Among the wild bluebells, and playfully courted
The breeze; and beside him a speckled snake lay,
Tight strangled, because it had hiss'd him away
From the flow'r at his finger; he rose and drew near
Like a Son of Immortals, one born to no fear,
But with strength of black locks and with eyes azure bright
To grow to large manhood of merciful might.
He came, with his face of bold wonder, to feel
The hair of my side, and to lift up my heel,
And question'd my face with wide eyes; but when under
My lids he saw tears, — for I wept at his wonder,
He stroked me, and utter'd such kindliness then,
That the once love of women, the friendship of men

In past sorrow, no kindness e'er came like a kiss
On my heart in its desolate day such as this!
And I yearn'd at his cheeks in my love, and down bent,
And lifted him up in my arms with intent
To kiss him, — but he cruel-kindly, alas!
Held out to my lips a pluck'd handful of grass!
Then I dropt him in horror, but felt as I fled
The stone he indignantly hurl'd at my head,
That dissever'd my ear, — but I felt not, whose fate
Was to meet more distress in his love than his hate!

Thus I wander'd, companion'd of grief and forlorn,
Till I wish'd for that land where my being was born,
But what was that land with its love, where my home
Was self-shut against me; for why should I come
Like an after-distress to my grey-bearded father,
With a blight to the last of his sight?—let him rather
Lament for me dead, and shed tears in the urn
Where I was not, and still in fond memory turn
To his son even such as he left him. Oh, how
Could I walk with the youth once my fellows, but now
Like Gods to my humbled estate? — or how bear
The steeds once the pride of my eyes and the care

Of my hands? Then I turn'd me self-banish'd, and came
Into Thessaly here, where I met with the same
As myself. I have heard how they met by a stream
In games, and were suddenly changed by a scream
That made wretches of many, as she roll'd her wild eyes
Against heav'n, and so vanish'd.—The gentle and wise
Lose their thoughts in deep studies, and others their ill
In the mirth of mankind where they mingle them still.

THE

TWO PEACOCKS OF BEDFONT.

THE

TWO PEACOCKS OF BEDFONT.

I.

Alas! that breathing Vanity should go
Where Pride is buried, — like its very ghost,
Uprisen from the naked bones below,
In novel flesh, clad in the silent boast
Of gaudy silk that flutters to and fro,
Shedding its chilling superstition most
On young and ignorant natures — as it wont
To haunt the peaceful churchyard of Bedfont!

II.

Each Sabbath morning, at the hour of prayer,
Behold two maidens, up the quiet green
Shining, far distant, in the summer air
That flaunts their dewy robes and breathes between
Their downy plumes, — sailing as if they were
Two far-off ships, — until they brush between
The churchyard's humble walls, and watch and wait
On either side of the wide open'd gate.

III.

And there they stand — with haughty necks before
God's holy house, that points towards the skies —
Frowning reluctant duty from the poor,
And tempting homage from unthoughtful eyes:
And Youth looks lingering from the temple door,
Breathing its wishes in unfruitful sighs,
With pouting lips, — forgetful of the grace,
Of health, and smiles, on the heart-conscious face; —

IV.

Because that Wealth, which has no bliss beside,
May wear the happiness of rich attire;
And those two sisters, in their silly pride,
May change the soul's warm glances for the fire
Of lifeless diamonds; — and for health deny'd, —
With art, that blushes at itself, inspire
Their languid cheeks — and flourish in a glory
That has no life in life, nor after-story.

V.

The aged priest goes shaking his grey hair
In meekest censuring, and turns his eye
Earthward in grief, and heavenward in pray'r,
And sighs, and clasps his hands, and passes by.
Good-hearted man! what sullen soul would wear
Thy sorrow for a garb, and constantly
Put on thy censure, that might win the praise
Of one so grey in goodness and in days?

VI.

Also the solemn clerk partakes the shame
Of this ungodly shine of human pride,
And sadly blends his reverence and blame
In one grave bow, and passes with a stride
Impatient: — many a red-hooded dame
Turns her pain'd head, but not her glance, aside
From wanton dress, and marvels o'er again,
That heaven hath no wet judgments for the vain.

VII.

"I have a lily in the bloom at home,"
Quoth one, "and by the blessed Sabbath day
I'll pluck my lily in its pride, and come
And read a lesson upon vain array; —
And when stiff silks are rustling up, and some
Give place, I'll shake it in proud eyes and say —
Making my reverence, — 'Ladies, an you please,
King Solomon's not half so fine as these.'"

VIII.

Then her meek partner, who has nearly run
His earthly course, — "Nay, Goody, let your text
Grow in the garden. — We have only one —
Who knows that these dim eyes may see the next?
Summer will come again, and summer sun,
And lilies too, — but I were sorely vext
To mar my garden, and cut short the blow
Of the last lily I may live to grow."

IX.

"The last!" quoth she, "and though the last it were—
Lo! those two wantons, where they stand so proud
With waving plumes, and jewels in their hair,
And painted cheeks, like Dagons to be bow'd
And curtsey'd to! — last Sabbath after pray'r,
I heard the little Tomkins ask aloud
If they were angels — but I made him know
God's bright ones better, with a bitter blow!"

X.

So speaking, they pursue the pebbly walk
That leads to the white porch the Sunday throng,
Hand-coupled urchins in restrained talk,
And anxious pedagogue that chastens wrong,
And posied churchwarden with solemn stalk,
And gold-bedizen'd beadle flames along,
And gentle peasant clad in buff and green,
Like a meek cowslip in the spring serene;

XI.

And blushing maiden — modestly array'd
In spotless white, — still conscious of the glass;
And she, the lonely widow, that hath made
A sable covenant with grief, — alas!
She veils her tears under the deep, deep shade,
While the poor kindly-hearted, as they pass,
Bend to unclouded childhood, and caress
Her boy, — so rosy! — and so fatherless!

XII.

Thus, as good Christians ought, they all draw near
The fair white temple, to the timely call
Of pleasant bells that tremble in the ear. —
Now the last frock, and scarlet hood, and shawl
Fade into dusk, in the dim atmosphere
Of the low porch, and heav'n has won them all,
— Saving those two, that turn aside and pass,
In velvet blossom, where all flesh is grass.

XIII.

Ah me! to see their silken manors trail'd
In purple luxuries — with restless gold, —
Flaunting the grass where widowhood has wail'd
In blotted black, — over the heapy mould
Panting wave-wantonly! They never quail'd
How the warm vanity abused the cold;
Nor saw the solemn faces of the gone
Sadly uplooking through transparent stone:

XIV.

But swept their dwellings with unquiet light,
Shocking the awful presence of the dead;
Where gracious natures would their eyes benight,
Nor wear their being with a lip too red,
Nor move too rudely in the summer bright
Of sun, but put staid sorrow in their tread,
Meting it into steps, with inward breath,
In very pity to bereaved death.

XV.

Now in the church, time-sober'd minds resign
To solemn pray'r, and the loud chaunted hymn, —
With glowing picturings of joys divine
Painting the mistlight where the roof is dim;
But youth looks upward to the window shine,
Warming with rose and purple and the swim
Of gold, as if thought-tinted by the stains
Of gorgeous light through many-colour'd panes;

XVI.

Soiling the virgin snow wherein God hath
Enrobed his angels, — and with absent eyes
Hearing of Heav'n, and its directed path,
Thoughtful of slippers, — and the glorious skies
Clouding with satin, — till the preacher's wrath
Consumes his pity, and he glows, and cries
With a deep voice that trembles in its might,
And earnest eyes grown eloquent in light:

XVII.

" O that the vacant eye would learn to look
On very beauty, and the heart embrace
True loveliness, and from this holy book
Drink the warm-breathing tenderness and grace
Of love indeed! O that the young soul took
Its virgin passion from the glorious face
Of fair religion, and address'd its strife,
To win the riches of eternal life!

XVIII.

‘ Doth the vain heart love glory that is none,
And the poor excellence of vain attire?
O go, and drown your eyes against the sun,
The visible ruler of the starry quire,
Till boiling gold in giddy eddies run,
Dazzling the brain with orbs of living fire;
And the faint soul down darkens into night,
And dies a burning martyrdom to light.

XIX.

“ O go, and gaze, — when the low winds of ev'n
Breathe hymns, and Nature's many forests nod
Their gold-crown'd heads; and the rich blooms of heav'n
Sun-ripen'd give their blushes up to God;
And mountain-rocks and cloudy steeps are riv'n
By founts of fire, as smitten by the rod
Of heavenly Moses, — that your thirsty sense
May quench its longings of magnificence!

XX.

“ Yet suns shall perish — stars shall fade away —
Day into darkness — darkness into death —
Death into silence; the warm light of day,
The blooms of summer, the rich glowing breath
Of even — all shall wither and decay,
Like the frail furniture of dreams beneath
The touch of morn — or bubbles of rich dyes
That break and vanish in the aching eyes.”

XXI.

They hear, soul-blushing, and repentant shed
Unwholesome thoughts in wholesome tears, and pour
Their sin to earth, — and with low drooping head
Receive the solemn blessing, and implore
Its grace — then soberly with chasten'd tread,
They meekly press towards the gusty door,
With humbled eyes that go to graze upon
The lowly grass — like him of Babylon.

XXII.

The lowly grass! — O water-constant mind!
Fast-ebbing holiness! — soon-fading grace
Of serious thought, as if the gushing wind
Through the low porch had wash'd it from the face
For ever! — How they lift their eyes to find
Old vanities. — Pride wins the very place
Of meekness, like a bird, and flutters now
With idle wings on the curl-conscious brow!

XXIII.

And lo! with eager looks they seek the way
Of old temptation at the lowly gate;
To feast on feathers, and on vain array,
And painted cheeks, and the rich glistering state
Of jewel-sprinkled locks. — But where are they,
The graceless haughty ones that used to wait
With lofty neck, and nods, and stiffen'd eye? —
None challenge the old homage bending by.

XXIV.

In vain they look for the ungracious bloom
Of rich apparel where it glow'd before, —
For Vanity has faded all to gloom,
And lofty Pride has stiffen'd to the core,
For impious Life to tremble at its doom, —
Set for a warning token evermore,
Whereon, as now, the giddy and the wise
Shall gaze with lifted hands and wond'ring eyes.

XXV.

The aged priest goes on each sabbath morn,
But shakes not sorrow under his grey hair;
The solemn clerk goes lavender'd and shorn,
Nor stoops his back to the ungodly pair; —
And ancient lips that pucker'd up in scorn,
Go smoothly breathing to the house of pray'r;
And in the garden-plot, from day to day,
The lily blooms its long white life away.

XXVI.

And where two haughty maidens used to be,
In pride of plume, where plumy Death had trod,
Trailing their gorgeous velvets wantonly,
Most unmeet pall, over the holy sod; —
There, gentle stranger, thou may'st only see
Two sombre Peacocks. —— Age, with sapient nod
Marking the spot, still tarries to declare
How they once lived, and wherefore they are there.

MINOR POEMS.

A RETROSPECTIVE REVIEW.

Oh, when I was a tiny boy
My days and nights were full of joy,
  My mates were blithe and kind! —
No wonder that I sometimes sigh,
And dash the tear-drop from my eye,
  To cast a look behind!

A hoop was an eternal round
Of pleasure. In those days I found
  A top a joyous thing; —
But now those past delights I drop,
My head, alas! is all my top,
  And careful thoughts the string!

My marbles — once my bag was stor'd, —
Now I must play with Elgin's lord,
  With Theseus for a taw!
My playful horse has slipt his string,
Forgotten all his capering,
  And harness'd to the law!

My kite — how fast and far it flew!
Whilst I, a sort of Franklin, drew
My pleasure from the sky!
'Twas paper'd o'er with studious themes,
The tasks I wrote — my present dreams
Will never soar so high!

My joys are wingless all and dead;
My dumps are made of more than lead;
My flights soon find a fall;
My fears prevail, my fancies droop,
Joy never cometh with a hoop,
And seldom with a call!

My football 's laid upon the shelf;
I am a shuttlecock myself
The world knocks to and fro; —
My archery is all unlearn'd,
And grief against myself has turn'd
My arrows and my bow!

No more in noontide sun I bask;
My authorship 's an endless task,
My head 's ne'er out of school:
My heart is pain'd with scorn and slight,
I have too many foes to fight,
And friends grown strangely cool!

The very chum that shared my cake
Holds out so cold a hand to shake,
  It makes me shrink and sigh: —
On this I will not dwell and hang,
The changeling would not feel a pang
  Though these should meet his eye!

No skies so blue or so serene
As then; — no leaves look half so green
  As cloth'd the play-ground tree!
All things I lov'd are alter'd so,
Nor does it ease my heart to know
  That change resides in me!

O, for the garb that mark'd the boy,
The trowsers made of corduroy,
  Well ink'd with black and red;
The crownless hat, ne'er deem'd an ill —
It only let the sunshine still
  Repose upon my head!

O, for the riband round the neck!
The careless dog's-ears apt to deck
  My book and collar both!
How can this formal man be styled
Merely an Alexandrine child,
  A boy of larger growth?

O for that small, small beer anew!
And (heaven's own type) that mild sky-blue
That wash'd my sweet meals down;
The master even! — and that small Turk
That fagg'd me! — worse is now my work —
A fag for all the town!

O for the lessons learn'd by heart!
Ay, though the very birch's smart
Should mark those hours again;
I 'd "kiss the rod," and be resign'd
Beneath the stroke, and even find
Some sugar in the cane!

The Arabian Nights rehears'd in bed!
The Fairy Tales in school-time read,
By stealth, 'twixt verb and noun!
The angel form that always walk'd
In all my dreams, and look'd and talk'd
Exactly like Miss Brown!

The *omne bene* — Christmas come!
The prize of merit, won for home —
Merit had prizes then!
But now I write for days and days,
For fame — a deal of empty praise,
Without the silver pen!

Then home, sweet home! the crowded coach—
The joyous shout — the loud approach —
  The winding horns like rams'!
The meeting sweet that made me thrill,
The sweetmeats almost sweeter still,
  No 'satis' to the 'jams!' —

When that I was a tiny boy
My days and nights were full of joy,
  My mates were blithe and kind!
No wonder that I sometimes sigh,
And dash the tear-drop from my eye,
  To cast a look behind!

FAIR INES.

I.

O saw ye not fair Ines?
She 's gone into the West,
To dazzle when the sun is down,
And rob the world of rest:
She took our daylight with her,
The smiles that we love best,
With morning blushes on her cheek,
And pearls upon her breast.

II.

O turn again, fair Ines,
Before the fall of night,
For fear the Moon should shine alone,
And stars unrivall'd bright;
And blessed will the lover be
That walks beneath their light,
And breathes the love against thy cheek
I dare not even write!

III.

Would I had been, fair Ines,
That gallant cavalier,
Who rode so gaily by thy side,
And whisper'd thee so near! —
Were there no bonny dames at home,
Or no true lovers here,
That he should cross the seas to win
The dearest of the dear?

IV.

I saw thee, lovely Ines,
Descend along the shore,
With bands of noble gentlemen,
And banners wav'd before;
And gentle youth and maidens gay,
And snowy plumes they wore; —
It would have been a beauteous dream,
— If it had been no more!

V.

Alas, alas, fair Ines,
She went away with song,
With Music waiting on her steps,
And shoutings of the throng;
But some were sad, and felt no mirth,
But only Music's wrong,
In sounds that sang Farewell, Farewell,
To her you've lov'd so long.

VI.

Farewell, farewell, fair Ines,
That vessel never bore
So fair a lady on its deck,
Nor danc'd so light before, —
Alas for pleasure on the sea,
And sorrow on the shore!
The smile that blest one lover's heart
Has broken many more!

THE DEPARTURE OF SUMMER.

SUMMER is gone on swallows' wings,
And Earth has buried all her flowers:
No more the lark, the linnet sings,
But Silence sits in faded bowers.
There is a shadow on the plain
Of Winter ere he comes again,—
There is in woods a solemn sound
Of hollow warnings whisper'd round,
As Echo in her deep recess
For once had turn'd a prophetess.
Shuddering Autumn stops to list,
And breathes his fear in sudden sighs,
With clouded face, and hazel eyes
That quench themselves, and hide in mist.

Yes, Summer 's gone like pageant bright;
Its glorious days of golden light
Are gone — the mimic suns that quiver,
Then melt in Time's dark-flowing river.
Gone the sweetly-scented breeze
That spoke in music to the trees;
Gone for damp and chilly breath,
As if fresh blown o'er marble seas,
Or newly from the lungs of Death. —
Gone its virgin roses' blushes,
Warm as when Aurora rushes
Freshly from the god's embrace,
With all her shame upon her face.
Old Time hath laid them in the mould;
Sure he is blind as well as old,
Whose hand relentless never spares
Young cheeks so beauty-bright as theirs!
Gone are the flame-ey'd lovers now
From where so blushing-blest they tarried
Under the hawthorn's blossom-bough,
Gone; for Day and Night are married.
All the light of love is fled: —
Alas! that negro breasts should hide

The lips that were so rosy red,
At morning and at even-tide!

Delightful Summer! then adieu
Till thou shalt visit us anew:
But who without regretful sigh
Can say, adieu, and see thee fly?
Not he that e'er hath felt thy pow'r,
His joy expanding like a flow'r
That cometh after rain and snow,
Looks up at heaven, and learns to glow: —
Not he that fled from Babel-strife
To the green sabbath-land of life,
To dodge dull Care 'mid cluster'd trees,
And cool his forehead in the breeze, —
Whose spirit, weary-worn perchance,
Shook from its wings a weight of grief,
And perch'd upon an aspen leaf,
For every breath to make it dance.

Farewell! — on wings of sombre stain,
That blacken in the last blue skies,
Thou fly'st; but thou wilt come again
On the gay wings of butterflies.

Spring at thy approach will sprout
Her new Corinthian beauties out,
Leaf-woven homes, where twitter-words
Will grow to songs, and eggs to birds;
Ambitious buds shall swell to flowers,
And April smiles to sunny hours.
Bright days shall be, and gentle nights
Full of soft breath and echo-lights,
As if the god of sun-time kept
His eyes half-open while he slept.
Roses shall be where roses were,
Not shadows, but reality;
As if they never perish'd there,
But slept in immortality:
Nature shall thrill with new delight,
And Time's relumin'd river run
Warm as young blood, and dazzling bright,
As if its source were in the sun!

But say, hath Winter then no charms?
Is there no joy, no gladness warms
His aged heart? no happy wiles
To cheat the hoary one to smiles?

Onward he comes — the cruel North
Pours his furious whirlwind forth
Before him — and we breathe the breath
Of famish'd bears that howl to death.
Onward he comes from rocks that blanch
O'er solid streams that never flow,
His tears all ice, his locks all snow,
Just crept from some huge avalanche —
A thing half-breathing and half-warm,
As if one spark began to glow
Within some statue's marble form,
Or pilgrim stiffen'd in the storm.
O! will not Mirth's light arrows fail
To pierce that frozen coat of mail?
O! will not Joy but strive in vain
To light up those glaz'd eyes again?

No! take him in, and blaze the oak,
And pour the wine, and warm the ale;
His sides shall shake to many a joke,
His tongue shall thaw in many a tale,
His eyes grow bright, his heart be gay,
And even his palsy charm'd away.

What heeds he then the boisterous shout
Of angry winds that scold without,
Like shrewish wives at tavern door?
What heeds he then the wild uproar
Of billows bursting on the shore?
In dashing waves, in howling breeze,
There is a music that can charm him;
When safe, and shelter'd, and at ease,
He hears the storm that cannot harm him.

But hark! those shouts! that sudden din
Of little hearts that laugh within.
O! take him where the youngsters play,
And he will grow as young as they!
They come! they come! each blue-ey'd Sport,
The Twelfth-Night King and all his court —
'Tis Mirth fresh crown'd with misletoe!
Music with her merry fiddles,
Joy "on light fantastic toe,"
Wit with all his jests and riddles,
Singing and dancing as they go.
And Love, young Love, among the rest,
A welcome — nor unbidden guest.

But still for Summer dost thou grieve?
Then read our Poets — they shall weave
A garden of green fancies still,
Where thy wish may rove at will.
They have kept for after treats
The essences of summer sweets,
And echoes of its songs that wind
In endless music through the mind:
They have stamp'd in visible traces
The "thoughts that breathe," in words that shine —
The flights of soul in sunny places —
To greet and company with thine.
These shall wing thee on to flow'rs —
The past or future, that shall seem
All the brighter in thy dream
For blowing in such desert hours.
The summer never shines so bright
As thought of in a winter's night;
And the sweetest loveliest rose
Is in the bud before it blows.
The dear one of the lover's heart
Is painted to his longing eyes,
In charms she ne'er can realize —
But when she turns again to part.

Dream thou then, and bind thy brow
With wreath of fancy roses now,
And drink of Summer in the cup
Where the Muse hath mix'd it up;
The "dance, and song, and sun-burnt mirth,"
With the warm nectar of the earth:
Drink! 'twill glow in every vein,
And thou shalt dream the winter through:
Then waken to the sun again,
And find thy Summer Vision true!

SONG.

FOR MUSIC.

A LAKE and a fairy boat
To sail in the moonlight clear, —
And merrily we would float
From the dragons that watch us here!

Thy gown should be snow-white silk,
And strings of orient pearls,
Like gossamers dipp'd in milk,
Should twine with thy raven curls!

Red rubies should deck thy hands,
And diamonds should be thy dow'r —
But Fairies have broke their wands,
And wishing has lost its pow'r!

ODE:

AUTUMN.

I.

I saw old Autumn in the misty morn
Stand shadowless like Silence, listening
To silence, for no lonely bird would sing
Into his hollow ear from woods forlorn,
Nor lowly hedge nor solitary thorn; —
Shaking his languid locks all dewy bright
With tangled gossamer that fell by night,
Pearling his coronet of golden corn.

II.

Where are the songs of Summer? — With the sun,
Oping the dusky eyelids of the south,
Till shade and silence waken up as one,
And Morning sings with a warm odorous mouth.

Where are the merry birds? — Away, away,
On panting wings through the inclement skies,
Lest owls should prey
Undazzled at noon-day,
And tear with horny beak their lustrous eyes.

III.

Where are the blooms of Summer? — In the west,
Blushing their last to the last sunny hours,
When the mild Eve by sudden Night is prest
Like tearful Proserpine, snatch'd from her flow'rs
To a most gloomy breast.
Where is the pride of Summer, — the green prime, —
The many, many leaves all twinkling? — Three
On the moss'd elm; three on the naked lime
Trembling, — and one upon the old oak tree!
Where is the Dryad's immortality? —
Gone into mournful cypress and dark yew,
Or wearing the long gloomy Winter through
In the smooth holly's green eternity.

IV.

The squirrel gloats on his accomplish'd hoard,
The ants have brimm'd their garners with ripe grain,

And honey bees have stor'd
The sweets of Summer in their luscious cells;
The swallows all have wing'd across the main;
But here the Autumn melancholy dwells,
And sighs her tearful spells
Amongst the sunless shadows of the plain.
Alone, alone,
Upon a mossy stone,
She sits and reckons up the dead and gone
With the last leaves for a love-rosary,
Whilst all the wither'd world looks drearily,
Like a dim picture of the drowned past
In the hush'd mind's mysterious far away,
Doubtful what ghostly thing will steal the last
Into that distance, grey upon the grey.

V.

O go and sit with her, and be o'ershaded
Under the languid downfal of her hair:
She wears a coronal of flowers faded
Upon her forehead, and a face of care;—
There is enough of wither'd every where
To make her bower,—and enough of gloom;

There is enough of sadness to invite,
If only for the rose that died, — whose doom
Is Beauty's, — she that with the living bloom
Of conscious cheeks most beautifies the light; —
There is enough of sorrowing, and quite
Enough of bitter fruits the earth doth bear, —
Enough of chilly droppings for her bowl;
Enough of fear and shadowy despair,
To frame her cloudy prison for the soul!

BALLAD.

Spring it is cheery,
Winter is dreary,
Green leaves hang, but the brown must fly;
When he 's forsaken,
Wither'd and shaken,
What can an old man do but die?

Love will not clip him,
Maids will not lip him,
Maud and Marian pass him by;
Youth it is sunny,
Age has no honey, —
What can an old man do but die?

June it was jolly,
O for its folly!
A dancing leg and a laughing eye;
Youth may be silly,
Wisdom is chilly, —
What can an old man do but die?

Friends, they are scanty,
Beggars are plenty,
If he has followers, I know why;
Gold's in his clutches,
(Buying him crutches!) —
What can an old man do but die?

HYMN TO THE SUN.

GIVER of glowing light!
Though but a god of other days,
The kings and sages
Of wiser ages
Still live and gladden in thy genial rays!

King of the tuneful lyre,
Still poets' hymns to thee belong;
Though lips are cold
Whereon of old
Thy beams all turn'd to worshipping and song!

Lord of the dreadful bow,
None triumph now for Python's death;
But thou dost save
From hungry grave
The life that hangs upon a summer breath.

Father of rosy day,
No more thy clouds of incense rise;
But waking flow'rs
At morning hours,
Give out their sweets to meet thee in the skies.

God of the Delphic fane,
No more thou listenest to hymns sublime;
But they will leave
On winds at eve,
A solemn echo to the end of time.

TO A COLD BEAUTY.

I.

LADY, wouldst thou heiress be
To Winter's cold and cruel part?
When he sets the rivers free,
Thou dost still lock up thy heart; —
Thou that shouldst outlast the snow,
But in the whiteness of thy brow?

II.

Scorn and cold neglect are made
For winter gloom and winter wind,
But thou wilt wrong the summer air,
Breathing it to words unkind, —
Breath which only should belong
To love, to sunlight, and to song!

III.

When the little buds unclose,
Red, and white, and pied, and blue,
And that virgin flow'r, the rose,
Opes her heart to hold the dew,
Wilt thou lock thy bosom up
With no jewel in its cup?

IV.

Let not cold December sit
Thus in Love's peculiar throne; —
Brooklets are not prison'd now,
But crystal frosts are all agone,
And that which hangs upon the spray,
It is no snow, but flow'r of May!

AUTUMN.

I.

THE Autumn skies are flush'd with gold,
And fair and bright the rivers run;
These are but streams of winter cold,
And painted mists that quench the sun.

II.

In secret boughs no sweet birds sing,
In secret boughs no bird can shroud;
These are but leaves that take to wing,
And wintry winds that pipe so loud.

III.

'Tis not trees' shade, but cloudy glooms
That on the cheerless vallies fall,
The flowers are in their grassy tombs,
And tears of dew are on them all.

RUTH.

She stood breast high amid the corn,
Clasp'd by the golden light of morn,
Like the sweetheart of the sun,
Who many a glowing kiss had won.

On her cheek an autumn flush,
Deeply ripened; — such a blush
In the midst of brown was born,
Like red poppies grown with corn.

Round her eyes her tresses fell,
Which were blackest none could tell,
But long lashes veil'd a light,
That had else been all too bright.

And her hat, with shady brim,
Made her tressy forehead dim ; —
Thus she stood amid the stooks,
Praising God with sweetest looks : —

Sure, I said, heav'n did not mean,
Where I reap thou should'st but glean,
Lay thy sheaf adown and come,
Share my harvest and my home.

THE SEA OF DEATH.

A FRAGMENT.

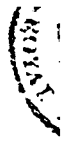
——— Methought I saw
Life swiftly treading over endless space;
And, at her foot-print, but a bygone pace,
The ocean-past, which, with increasing wave,
Swallow'd her steps like a pursuing grave.

Sad were my thoughts that anchor'd silently
On the dead waters of that passionless sea,
Unstirr'd by any touch of living breath:
Silence hung over it, and drowsy Death,
Like a gorged sea-bird, slept with folded wings
On crowded carcases — sad passive things
That wore the thin grey surface, like a veil
Over the calmness of their features pale.

And there were spring-faced cherubs that did sleep
Like water-lilies on that motionless deep,

How beautiful! with bright unruffled hair
On sleek unfretted brows, and eyes that were
Buried in marble tombs, a pale eclipse!
And smile-bedimpled cheeks, and pleasant lips,
Meekly apart, as if the soul intense
Spake out in dreams of its own innocence:
And so they lay in loveliness, and kept
The birth-night of their peace, that Life e'en wept
With very envy of their happy fronts;
For there were neighbour brows scarr'd by the brunts
Of strife and sorrowing — where Care had set
His crooked autograph, and marr'd the jet
Of glossy locks, with hollow eyes forlorn,
And lips that curl'd in bitterness and scorn —
Wretched,—as they had breathed of this world's pain,
And so bequeath'd it to the world again
Through the beholder's heart in heavy sighs.

So lay they garmented in torpid light,
Under the pall of a transparent night,
Like solemn apparitions lull'd sublime
To everlasting rest,—and with them Time
Slept, as he sleeps upon the silent face
Of a dark dial in a sunless place.



BALLAD.

She's up and gone, the graceless Girl!
And robb'd my failing years;
My blood before was thin and cold
But now 'tis turn'd to tears;—
My shadow falls upon my grave,
So near the brink I stand,
She might have staid a little yet,
And led me by the hand!

Aye, call her on the barren moor,
And call her on the hill,
'Tis nothing but the heron's cry,
And plovers answer shrill;
My child is flown on wilder wings,
Than they have ever spread,
And I may even walk a waste
That widen'd when she fled.

Full many a thankless child has been,
But never one like mine;
Her meat was served on plates of gold,
Her drink was rosy wine;
But now she'll share the robin's food,
And sup the common rill,
Before her feet will turn again
To meet her father's will!

I REMEMBER, I REMEMBER.

I.

I remember, I remember,
The house where I was born,
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn;
He never came a wink too soon,
Nor brought too long a day,
But now, I often wish the night
Had borne my breath away!

II.

I remember, I remember,
The roses, red and white,
The vi'lets, and the lily-cups,
Those flowers made of light!
The lilacs where the robin built,
And where my brother set
The liburnam on his birth-day, —
The tree is living yet!

III.

I remember, I remember
Where I was used to swing,
And thought the air must rush as fresh
To swallows on the wing;
My spirit flew in feathers then,
That is so heavy now,
And summer pools could hardly cool
The fever on my brow!

IV.

I remember, I remember
The fir trees dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky:
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from heav'n
Than when I was a boy.

BALLAD.

SIGH on sad heart, for Love's eclipse,
And Beauty's fairest queen,
Tho' 'tis not for my peasant lips
To soil her name between:
A king might lay his sceptre down,
But I am poor and nought,
The brow should wear a golden crown
That wears her in its thought.

The diamonds glancing in her hair,
Whose sudden beams surprise,
Might bid such humble hopes beware
The glancing of her eyes;
Yet looking once, I look'd too long,
And if my love is sin,
Death follows on the heels of wrong,
And kills the crime within.

Her dress seem'd wove of lily leaves,
It was so pure and fine,
O lofty wears, and lowly weaves,
But hoddan grey is mine;
And homely hose must step apart,
Where garter'd princes stand,
But may he wear my love at heart
That wins her lily hand!

Alas! there's far from russet frize
To silks and satin gowns,
But I doubt if God made like degrees,
In courtly hearts and clowns.
My father wrong'd a maiden's mirth,
And brought her cheeks to blame,
And all that's lordly of my birth,
Is my reproach and shame!

'Tis vain to weep, — 'tis vain to sigh,
'Tis vain this idle speech,
For where her happy pearls do lie,
My tears may never reach;

Yet when I'm gone, e'en lofty pride
May say of what has been,
His love was nobly born and died,
Tho' all the rest was mean!

My speech is rude, — but speech is weak
Such love as mine to tell,
Yet had I words, I dare not speak,
So, Lady, fare thee well;
I will not wish thy better state
Was one of low degree,
But I must weep that partial fate
Made such a churl of me.

THE WATER LADY.

Alas, the moon should ever beam
To show what man should never see! —
I saw a maiden on a stream,
And fair was she!

I staid awhile, to see her throw
Her tresses back, that all beset
The fair horizon of her brow
With clouds of jet.

I staid a little while to view
Her cheek, that wore in place of red
The bloom of water, tender blue,
Daintily spread.

I staid to watch, a little space,
Her parted lips if she would sing;
The waters closed above her face
With many a ring.

And still I stay'd a little more,
Alas! she never comes again;
I throw my flow'rs from the shore,
And watch in vain.

I know my life will fade away,
I know that I must vainly pine,
For I am made of mortal clay,
But she 's divine!

THE EXILE.

THE swallow with summer
Will wing o'er the seas,
The wind that I sigh to
Will visit thy trees,
The ship that it hastens
Thy ports will contain,
But me — I must never
See England again!

There's many that weep there,
But one weeps alone,
For the tears that are falling
So far from her own;
So far from thy own, love.
We know not our pain;
If death is between us,
Or only the main.

When the white cloud reclines
On the verge of the sea,
I fancy the white cliffs,
And dream upon thee;
But the cloud spreads its wings
To the blue heav'n and flies.
We never shall meet, love,
Except in the skies!

TO AN ABSENTEE.

O'ER hill, and dale, and distant sea,
Through all the miles that stretch between,
My thought must fly to rest on thee,
And would, though worlds should intervene.

Nay, thou art now so dear, methinks
The farther we are forc'd apart,
Affection's firm elastic links
But bind the closer round the heart.

For now we sever each from each,
I learn what I have lost in thee;
Alas, that nothing less could teach,
How great indeed my love should be!

Farewell! I did not know thy worth,
But thou art gone, and now 'tis priz'd:
So angels walk'd unknown on earth,
But when they flew were recogniz'd!

SONG.

I.

THE stars are with the voyager
Wherever he may sail;
The moon is constant to her time;
The sun will never fail;
But follow, follow round the world,
The green earth and the sea;
So love is with the lover's heart,
Wherever he may be.

II.

Wherever he may be, the stars
Must daily lose their light;
The moon will veil her in the shade;
The sun will set at night.
The sun may set, but constant love
Will shine when he 's away;
So that dull night is never night,
And day is brighter day.

ODE TO THE MOON.

I.

MOTHER of light! how fairly dost thou go
Over those hoary crests, divinely led! —
Art thou that huntress of the silver bow
Fabled of old? Or rather dost thou tread
Those cloudy summits thence to gaze below,
Like the wild Chamois from her Alpine snow,
Where hunter never climb'd, — secure from dread?
How many antique fancies have I read
Of that mild presence! and how many wrought!
Wondrous and bright,
Upon the silver light,
Chasing fair figures with the artist, Thought!

II.

What art thou like? — Sometimes I see thee ride
A far-bound galley on its perilous way,
Whilst breezy waves toss up their silvery spray; —
Sometimes behold thee glide,
Cluster'd by all thy family of stars,
Like a lone widow, through the welkin wide,
Whose pallid cheek the midnight sorrow mars; —
Sometimes I watch thee on from steep to steep,
Timidly lighted by thy vestal torch,
Till in some Latmian cave I see thee creep,
To catch the young Endymion asleep, —
Leaving thy splendour at the jagged porch! —

III.

Oh, thou art beautiful, howe'er it be!
Huntress, or Dian, or whatever nam'd;
And he, the veriest Pagan, that first fram'd
A silver idol, and ne'er worshipp'd thee! —
It is too late, or thou should'st have my knee;
Too late now for the old Ephesian vows,
And not divine the crescent on thy brows! —
Yet, call thee nothing but the mere mild Moon,
Behind those chesnut boughs,
Casting their dappled shadows at my feet;
I will be grateful for that simple boon,
In many a thoughtful verse and anthem sweet,
And bless thy dainty face whene'er we meet.

IV.

In nights far gone, — ay, far away and dead, —
Before Care-fretted with a lidless eye, —
I was thy wooer on my little bed,
Letting the early hours of rest go by,
To see thee flood the heaven with milky light,
And feed thy snow-white swans, before I slept;
For thou wert then purveyor of my dreams, —
Thou wert the fairies' armourer, that kept
Their burnish'd helms, and crowns, and corslets bright,
Their spears, and glittering mails;
And ever thou didst spill in winding streams
Sparkles and midnight gleams,
For fishes to new gloss their argent scales! —

V.

Why sighs? — why creeping tears? — why clasped hands? —
Is it to count the boy's expended dow'r?
That fairies since have broke their gifted wands?
That young Delight, like any o'erblown flow'r,
Gave, one by one, its sweet leaves to the ground? —
Why then, fair Moon, for all thou mark'st no hour,
Thou art a sadder dial to old Time
Than ever I have found
On sunny garden-plot, or moss-grown tow'r,
Motto'd with stern and melancholy rhyme.

VI.

Why should I grieve for this? — O I must yearn,
Whilst Time, conspirator with Memory,
Keeps his cold ashes in an ancient urn,
Richly emboss'd with childhood's revelry,
With leaves and cluster'd fruits, and flow'rs eterne, —
(Eternal to the world, though not to me,)
Aye there will those brave sports and blossoms be,
The deathless wreath, and undecay'd festoon,
When I am hears'd within, —
Less than the pallid primrose to the Moon,
That now she watches through a vapour thin.

VII.

So let it be: — Before I liv'd to sigh,
Thou wert in Avon, and a thousand rills,
Beautiful Orb! and so, whene'er I lie
Trodden, thou wilt be gazing from thy hills.
Blest be thy loving light, where'er it spills,
And blessed thy fair face, O Mother mild!
Still shine, the soul of rivers as they run,
Still lend thy lonely lamp to lovers fond,
And blend their plighted shadows into one:
Still smile at even on the bedded child,
And close his eyelids with thy silver wand! —

TO ———.

WELCOME, dear Heart, and a most kind good-morrow;
The day is gloomy, but our looks shall shine: —
Flow'rs I have none to give thee, but I borrow
Their sweetness in a verse to speak for thine.

Here are red roses, gather'd at thy cheeks, —
The white were all too happy to look white:
For love the rose, for faith the lily speaks;
It withers in false hands, but here 'tis bright!

Dost love sweet Hyacinth? Its scented leaf
Curls manifold, — all love's delights blow double:
'Tis said this flow'ret is inscribed with grief; —
But let that hint of a forgotten trouble.

I pluck'd the Primrose at night's dewy noon;
Like Hope, it show'd its blossoms in the night; —
'Twas, like Endymion, watching for the Moon!
And here are Sun-flowers, amorous of light!

These golden Buttercups are April's seal, —
The Daisy stars her constellations be:
These grew so lowly, I was forced to kneel,
Therefore I pluck no Daisies but for thee!

Here 's Daisies for the morn, Primrose for gloom,
Pansies and Roses for the noontide hours: —
A wight once made a dial of their bloom, —
So may thy life be measur'd out by flow'rs!.

THE FORSAKEN.

The dead are in their silent graves,
And the dew is cold above,
And the living weep and sigh,
Over dust that once was love.

Once I only wept the dead,
But now the living cause my pain:
How couldst thou steal me from my tears,
To leave me to my tears again?

My Mother rests beneath the sod, —
Her rest is calm and very deep:
I wish'd that she could see our loves, —
But now I gladden in her sleep.

Last night unbound my raven locks,
The morning saw them turn'd to gray,
Once they were black and well belov'd,
But thou art chang'd, — and so are they!

The useless lock I gave thee once,
To gaze upon and think of me,
Was ta'en with smiles, — but this was torn
In sorrow that I send to thee!

AUTUMN.

The Autumn is old,
The sere leaves are flying;—
He hath gather'd up gold,
And now he is dying;—
Old age, begin sighing!

The vintage is ripe,
The harvest is heaping;—
But some that have sow'd
Have no riches for reaping;—
Poor wretch, fall a weeping!

The year 's in the wane,
There is nothing adorning,
The night has no eve,
And the day has no morning;—
Cold winter gives warning.

The rivers run chill,
The red sun is sinking,
And I am grown old,
And life is fast shrinking;—
Here 's enow for sad thinking!

ODE TO MELANCHOLY.

COME, let us set our careful breasts,
Like Philomel, against the thorn,
To aggravate the inward grief,
That makes her accents so forlorn;
The world has many cruel points,
Whereby our bosoms have been torn,
And there are dainty themes of grief,
In sadness to outlast the morn,—
True honour's dearth, affection's death,
Neglectful pride, and cankering scorn,
With all the piteous tales that tears
Have water'd since the world was born.

The world! — it is a wilderness,
Where tears are hung on every tree;
For thus my gloomy phantasy
Makes all things weep with me!

Come let us sit and watch the sky,
And fancy clouds, where no clouds be;
Grief is enough to blot the eye,
And make heav'n black with misery.
Why should birds sing such merry notes,
Unless they were more blest than we?
No sorrow ever chokes their throats,
Except sweet nightingale; for she
Was born to pain our hearts the more
With her sad melody.
Why shines the sun, except that he
Makes gloomy nooks for Grief to hide,
And pensive shades for Melancholy,
When all the earth is bright beside?
Let clay wear smiles, and green grass wave,
Mirth shall not win us back again,
Whilst man is made of his own grave,
And fairest clouds but gilded rain!

I saw my mother in her shroud,
Her cheek was cold and very pale;
And ever since I've look'd on all
As creatures doom'd to fail!

Why do buds ope, except to die?
Ay, let us watch the roses wither,
And think of our loves' cheeks;
And oh, how quickly time doth fly
To bring death's winter hither!
Minutes, hours, days, and weeks,
Months, years, and ages, shrink to nought;
An age past is but a thought!

Ay, let us think of Him a while,
That, with a coffin for a boat,
Rows daily o'er the Stygian moat,
And for our table choose a tomb:
There's dark enough in any skull
To charge with black a raven plume;
And for the saddest funeral thoughts
A winding sheet hath ample room,
Where Death, with his keen-pointed style,
Hath writ the common doom.
How wide the yew tree spreads its gloom,
And o'er the dead lets fall its dew,
As if in tears it wept for them,
The many human families
That sleep around its stem!

How cold the dead have made these stones,
With natural drops kept ever wet!
Lo! here the best, the worst, the world
Doth now remember or forget,
Are in one common ruin hurl'd,
And love and hate are calmly met;
The loveliest eyes that ever shone,
The fairest hands, and locks of jet.
Is't not enough to vex our souls,
And fill our eyes, that we have set
Our love upon a rose's leaf,
Our hearts upon a violet?
Blue eyes, red cheeks, are frailer yet;
And, sometimes, at their swift decay
Beforehand we must fret:
The roses bud and bloom again;
But love may haunt the grave of love,
And watch the mould in vain.

O clasp me, sweet, whilst thou art mine,
And do not take my tears amiss;
For tears must flow to wash away
A thought that shows so stern as this:

Forgive, if somewhile I forget,
In woe to come, the present bliss.
As frighted Proserpine let fall
Her flowers at the sight of Dis,
Ev'n so the dark and bright will kiss.
The sunniest things throw sternest shade,
And there is ev'n a happiness
That makes the heart afraid!

Now let us with a spell invoke
The full-orb'd moon to grieve our eyes;
Not bright, not bright, but, with a cloud
Lapp'd all about her, let her rise
All pale and dim, as if from rest
The ghost of the late buried sun
Had crept into the skies.
The Moon! she is the source of sighs,
The very face to make us sad;
If but to think in other times
The same calm quiet look she had,
As if the world held nothing base,
Of vile and mean, of fierce and bad;

The same fair light that shone in streams,
The fairy lamp that charm'd the lad;
For so it is, with spent delights
She taunts men's brains, and makes them mad.

All things are touch'd with Melancholy,
Born of the secret soul's mistrust,
To feel her fair ethereal wings
Weigh'd down with vile degraded dust;
Even the bright extremes of joy
Bring on conclusions of disgust,
Like the sweet blossoms of the May,
Whose fragrance ends in must.
O give her, then, her tribute just,
Her sighs and tears, and musings holy!
There is no music in the life
That sounds with idiot laughter solely;
There's not a string attun'd to mirth,
But has its chord in Melancholy.

SONNET

ON MISTRESS NICELY, A PATTERN FOR HOUSEKEEPERS.

Written after seeing Mrs. Davenport in the character, at Covent Garden.

SHE was a woman peerless in her station,
With household virtues wedded to her name;
Spotless in linen, grass-bleach'd in her fame,
And pure and clear-starch'd in her conversation; —
Thence in my Castle of Imagination
She dwells for evermore, the dainty dame,
To keep all airy draperies from shame,
And all dream furnitures in preservation:
There walketh she with keys quite silver bright,
In perfect hose, and shoes of seemly black,
Apron and stomacher of lily-white,
And decent order follows in her track:
The burnish'd plate grows lustrous in her sight,
And polish'd floors and tables shine her back.

SONNET.

WRITTEN IN A VOLUME OF SHAKSPEARE.

How bravely Autumn paints upon the sky
The gorgeous fame of Summer which is fled!
Hues of all flow'rs that in their ashes lie,
Trophied in that fair light whereon they fed,
Tulip, and hyacinth, and sweet rose red, —
Like exhalations from the leafy mould,
Look here how honour glorifies the dead,
And warms their scutcheons with a glance of gold! —
Such is the memory of poets old,
Who on Parnassus' hill have bloom'd elate;
Now they are laid under their marbles cold,
And turn'd to clay, whereof they were create;
But God Apollo hath them all enroll'd,
And blazon'd on the very clouds of fate!

SONNET

TO FANCY.

Most delicate Ariel! submissive thing,
Won by the mind's high magic to its hest, —
Invisible embassy, or secret guest, —
Weighing the light air on a lighter wing; —
Whether into the midnight moon, to bring
Illuminate visions to the eye of rest, —
Or rich romances from the florid West, —
Or to the sea, for mystic whispering, —
Still by thy charm'd allegiance to the will,
The fruitful wishes prosper in the brain,
As by the fingering of fairy skill, —
Moonlight, and waters, and soft music's strain,
Odours, and blooms, and *my* Miranda's smile,
Making this dull world an enchanted isle.

SONNET

TO AN ENTHUSIAST.

YOUNG ardent soul, graced with fair Nature's truth,
Spring warmth of heart, and fervency of mind,
And still a large late love of all thy kind,
Spite of the world's cold practice and Time's tooth, —
For all these gifts, I know not, in fair sooth,
Whether to give thee joy, or bid thee blind
Thine eyes with tears, — that thou hast not resign'd
The passionate fire and freshness of thy youth:
For as the current of thy life shall flow,
Gilded by shine of sun or shadow-stain'd,
Through flow'ry valley or unwholesome fen,
Thrice blessed in thy joy, or in thy woe
Thrice cursed of thy race, — thou art ordain'd
To share beyond the lot of common men.

SONNET.

It is not death, that sometime in a sigh
This eloquent breath shall take its speechless flight;
That sometime these bright stars, that now reply
In sunlight to the sun, shall set in night;
That this warm conscious flesh shall perish quite,
And all life's ruddy springs forget to flow;
That thoughts shall cease, and the immortal spright
Be lapp'd in alien clay and laid below;
It is not death to know this, — but to know
That pious thoughts, which visit at new graves
In tender pilgrimage, will cease to go
So duly and so oft, — and when grass waves
Over the past-away, there may be then
No resurrection in the minds of men.

SONNET.

By ev'ry sweet tradition of true hearts,
Graven by Time, in love with his own lore;
By all old martyrdoms and antique smarts,
Wherein Love died to be alive the more;
Yea, by the sad impression on the shore,
Left by the drown'd Leander, to endear
That coast for ever, where the billow's roar
Moaneth for pity in the Poet's ear;
By Hero's faith, and the foreboding tear
That quench'd her brand's last twinkle in its fall;
By Sappho's leap, and the low rustling fear
That sigh'd around her flight; I swear by all,
The world shall find such pattern in my act,
As if Love's great examples still were lack'd.

SONNET

ON RECEIVING A GIFT.

Look how the golden ocean shines above
Its pebbly stones, and magnifies their girth;
So does the bright and blessed light of love
Its own things glorify, and raise their worth.
As weeds seem flowers beneath the flattering brine,
And stones like gems, and gems as gems indeed,
Ev'n so our tokens shine; nay, they outshine
Pebbles and pearls, and gems and coral weed;
For where be ocean waves but half so clear,
So calmly constant, and so kindly warm,
As Love's most mild and glowing atmosphere,
That hath no dregs to be upturn'd by storm?
Thus, sweet, thy gracious gifts are gifts of price,
And more than gold to doting Avarice.

SONNET.

THE curse of Adam, the old curse of all,
Though I inherit in this feverish life
Of worldly toil, vain wishes, and hard strife,
And fruitless thought, in Care's eternal thrall,
Yet more sweet honey than of bitter gall
I taste, through thee, my Eva, my sweet wife.
Then what was Man's lost Paradise! — how rife
Of bliss, since love is with him in his fall!
Such as our own pure passion still might frame,
Of this fair earth, and its delightful bow'rs,
If no fell sorrow, like the serpent, came
To trail its venom o'er the sweetest flow'rs; —
But oh! as many and such tears are ours,
As only should be shed for guilt and shame!

SONNET.

Love, dearest Lady, such as I would speak,
Lives not within the humour of the eye; —
Not being but an outward phantasy,
That skims the surface of a tinted cheek, —
Else it would wane with beauty, and grow weak,
As if the rose made summer, — and so lie
Amongst the perishable things that die,
Unlike the love which I would give and seek:
Whose health is of no hue — to feel decay
With cheeks' decay, that have a rosy prime.
Love is its own great loveliness alway,
And takes new lustre from the touch of time;
Its bough owns no December and no May,
But bears its blossom into Winter's clime.

SONNET.

SILENCE.

THERE is a silence where hath been no sound,
  There is a silence where no sound may be,
  In the cold grave — under the deep deep sea,
Or in wide desert where no life is found,
Which hath been mute, and still must sleep profound;
  No voice is hush'd — no life treads silently,
  But clouds and cloudy shadows wander free,
That never spoke, over the idle ground:
But in green ruins, in the desolate walls
  Of antique palaces, where Man hath been,
Though the dun fox, or wild hyena, calls,
  And owls, that flit continually between,
Shriek to the echo, and the low winds moan,
There the true Silence is, self-conscious and alone.

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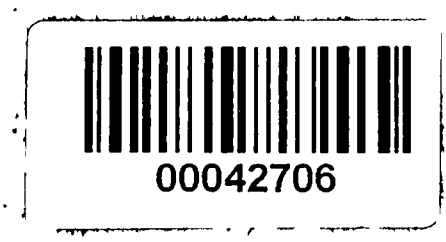
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